

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle  
Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois  
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The Twelfth Sunday of the Year (A)

Today, the Psalmist sings, "zeal for your house consumes me" (Psalm 69:10). What does this mean?

Zeal is an uncommon word today, but it is an appropriate way to describe the Christian life to which we are called and to which we pledged ourselves in Baptism.

Zeal can be described as a great fervor for a particular cause; or as a great ardor or love; as an enthusiastic devotion; or even as a prompt willingness. To be filled, then, with zeal for the Lord's house is to be filled with such a deep love of the Lord that this consumes our thoughts and motivates our every action.

The Psalmist is filled with zeal for the things of the Lord because, as he says to the Lord, "the insults of those who blaspheme you fall upon me" (Psalm 69:10). The Psalmist is so intimately united to the Lord through prayer and through his love that he himself is insulted when the Lord is blasphemed. Would that it were so with each of us!

The Psalmist's love of and devotion to the Lord is set aflame and his very life is directed by this zeal; there is nothing more important to him than the things of God. Would

that it were so with us! What if we, too, were consumed with zeal for the house of the Lord?

In the first reading, we see that the Prophet Jeremiah's zeal for the Lord brought him deep persecution and "terror on every side" (Jeremiah 20:10). Yet even as his former friends plot his demise, Jeremiah's zeal does not decrease; rather, it increases and he renews his trust in the Lord and sings his praises. Would that it were so with us! All too often we are ashamed even to make the sign of the Cross in public as we sit down to a meal.

Where is our zeal for the Lord? What consumes our thoughts and motivates our actions? Is it our job? Our family? Our reputation? Our school? Our athletics? Our money? Each of these things is good, but when they consume us more than the things of the Lord we have strayed from the narrow path and stepped foot on the road of sin. Whenever we allow someone or something to take precedence before the Lord and things that pertain to him we stray from the path that will lead us to fulfillment, joy and peace.

Why are we so concerned about what someone might think of us? What is it about the opinion of another person that seems more important than how we stand in the eyes of God? Why have we so convinced ourselves that this life is more important than the life to come?

Turning to the second reading, as we catch a glimpse of Saint Paul's zeal, we see that he was concerned only with the things of God. He went so far as to write this letter to the people of the city of Rome in advance of his visit there. His proclamation of the Gospel would eventually cost him his life, yet his zeal for the Lord did not decrease. This Apostle to the Gentiles listened well to the words of Jesus, "Fear no one" (Matthew 10:26).

Do we not trust the Lord? Do we not believe him when he says, "Even all of the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:30-31). There is nothing to fear in Jesus for he has promised, "everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father" (Matthew 10:32). These words are comforting, for those who are consumed by zeal for his house.

It is not men that we are too fear, but Satan, the one "who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" (Matthew 10:28). It is true that there is a fear of the Lord that is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but this is not a dread of the Lord himself but rather the fear of failing him, of disappointing him.

I often wonder if we do not fear the Lord because we think he will punish us. How often have we heard victims of the recent flooding say, "I don't know why the Lord has done this to

us..." It was not the Lord who caused the flooding; the floods are a natural result of heavy rains. The Lord has permeated the flooding, but he is not the cause of it.

What, then, is the Lord's answer to suffering and pain? His answer is Jesus Christ, God made man.

When Christ the Lord took upon himself our humanity and took upon himself the punishment for sin, he said to all of humanity: "For your sake I bear insult, and shame covers my face. I have become an outcast to my brothers, a stranger to my children, because zeal for your house consumes me" (Psalm 69:8-10).