

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

12/18/11 4 Advent B

I have not lived in a house since the day I brought the people up from Egypt to this very day....

--This line comes from a verse left out of the middle of our first reading today, and in many ways it's the most critical verse. It gives some insight into why the Lord did not want David to build a temple for him.

-- The Lord had been housed in a tent, like a desert nomad. There are still some people in Holy Land today who dwell in tents, especially the Bedouins. In a place where there are now walls between Israelis and Palestinians, they may be the people with the most freedom.

-- Yet there's something in the human spirit that wants to settle down into a permanent home. King David had that spirit. This David standing before you felt it after my mom died and I had the urge to find a home, even if it was only a refuge on my day off. True, it's a modest one bedroom condo, but it's by Lake Erie and has served me for 13 years.

-- But God cannot be confined to a building, even a magnificent one. When David's son Solomon built the great Temple God did not make it a permanent home. It was eventually destroyed, and later rebuilt when the people returned from exile.

-- God's people have always been on the move. During these coming three weeks we'll recall Joseph and Mary's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the wise men coming from the East to find Jesus, the flight to Egypt and eventual return of the family to Nazareth.

-- And during his public ministry Jesus would not have a permanent home of his own. He would live wherever he was preaching: with Peter in Capernaum, with Lazarus in Bethany, sometimes sleeping out in the open.

-- The call to follow God's way is a call to be open to moving on—not always physically (though sometimes that), but always in spirit. God's people can't settle into a way of life, never thinking we will change.

-- Mary demonstrated that openness to God's spirit and a willingness to move on. No doubt she had planned to raise a family with Joseph, have several children, and settle into the life of the wife of a builder. But God had other things in mind for her.

-- We can get comfortable—almost too comfortable—with the way things are. It takes an effort simply to change our responses at Mass, to get used to saying something as simple as *And with your Spirit* instead of “And also with you.”

-- It takes a greater effort for parishes to get used to new configurations, with sharing ministries with other parishes (and sometimes pastors). In short, it requires openness to God to make changes.

-- But we have a God on the move. One person in recent memory symbolized that for me. The late Bishop Ken Untener of the Diocese of Saginaw decided to sell the big house the bishop lived in there. He then lived, one month at a time, with priests in his diocese at their various residences.

-- It was controversial, and not all his brother bishops appreciated it. And I would not advocate this for all bishops. But it helped his ministry and showed his openness to the people of his diocese.

-- Most of us are not called to live in tents or move around and impose on relatives and friends for shelter. But we are all called to an openness to move in spirit when the Lord calls us to a change of heart, and perhaps to a change in how we serve him in this world.

-- Our God could not be permanently confined to a house of cedar, no matter how glorious it might be. God still defies the boundaries of place and time, and challenges us to follow him on the journey.

-- Like Mary, will we be open to God's call to move on? It may be unsettling and a bit challenging, but God will be with us on the move.