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God Pitched His Tent

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God Pitched His Tent

by KILIAN McDONNELL, O.S.B.

The long history of man's search for God, man has attempted to bring God near. Man would say to himself, "God is everywhere, therefore He is here. I am near Him, and He is near me." The religious man has always practiced the presence of God.

If man desired this, so did God. To Abraham God said, "Walk in my presence and be perfect." Abraham was asked to be always aware of God's presence. Wherever Abraham went, there God and His love would be.

The practice of the presence of God has lost none of its validity. But however praiseworthy the practice, neither man nor God has been satisfied with it alone. Besides remembering God's presence everywhere, man has always wanted to tie God down geographically, spatially, to some particular measurable place where God would be with him, not only God but the whole presence of God.

This presence of God in the Jewish tabernacle or tent was God's presence in a special manner, in a given geographical place. Though the Jews could never reach the place where God would be, they could always say, "It was there, in the tent of the Lord, that we saw Him." Thus, the presence of God was tied to a geographical place: Palestine; to a geographical place.

But man was not satisfied. He wanted to see God face to face. So the Lord responded, "I will go. I will be there for you." When they entered the tabernacle, the Israelites would see the cloud. Then they would know that God was among them. God dwelt with the Israelites as they wandered through the Sinai desert and pitched the tent. God dwelt with them on earth, no longer in the desert.

God dwelt with the Israelites in a way that was not possible in the desert. They could not see God face to face. But now they could see God's presence in the tabernacle, in the cloud of the Lord. When the cloud moved, the Israelites knew that God was among them.

Now it was God's presence that moved. The cloud moved to the tent, not to the Israelites. God's presence was not tied down to one place. God's presence was not limited to one geographical place. God's presence was not limited to one time. God's presence was not limited to one condition.

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