



You remember back in the good 'ole sanctuary days when we had you fill out those pew pads? Where we would ask you to sign your name, whether or not you would commune, visitors were to write out their addresses so we could flood them with non-stop mailings, of course? I always wonder if such church attendance sheets should include another column for "What are you doing here?" The same question God asks Elijah in the first reading. It may not bring up quite the same earth-moving encounter as the two of them in First Kings, but if people were truly honest with themselves; "What are you doing here [for worship]?" would provide for some rather interesting soul-searching, to say the least.

For some, it could be similar to the prophet Elijah, as to why they come to a worship anywhere around the world. Some are scared, not knowing where to turn. The church, they hope, provides a safe-haven that they have been desperately searching for, for far too long. For others, they're hoping for an earthquake-equivalent of a spiritual encounter with God, something that will make them feel closer to the Almighty to overcome the loneliness they believe they are enduring from the Holy One. Some are hoping for a relentless fire to be unleashed in the depths of their soul, to give them the motivation they have lost during these pandemic times, when so much about the world is nowhere near the same. And still, others, are longing for a bit of silence amidst the noise and chaos of their life, yearning for a little bit of stillness to calm their weary soul. "What are you doing here?" would unleash a rather intriguing faith conversation-starter, not just for us worshipers today, but, also, when considering those long, long ago.

For instance, tomorrow, is the day when the church commemorates St. Lawrence, and yes, we non-Catholics are allowed to appreciate the officially recognized saints of the church. Lawrence is not exactly the most famous one of all. You will see scatterings of schools and churches and cemeteries in his name, but I have a feeling Lawrence would have a rather profound response to God's question, "What are you doing here?"

Because, the story so goes that, back in the third century, persecution of the Jesus-followers was still alive and well. Christians were not exactly living the most patriotic lives when it came to the Roman Empire, and so the Emperor unleashed another round of violence, including against the Pope, who was put to death. Lawrence was a deacon in charge of finances and other material goods of the church, as well as making sure to contribute a significant portion of it to the needs of those in poverty. Tradition has it that, when the Pope was arrested, Lawrence gave all *he* had on hand to the poor, knowing full well he would soon be next. He even sold the vessels of the altar for more to be given to those in need. Soon enough, the Emperor heard about this, convinced the church was sitting on a goldmine of the richest treasures, and demanded Lawrence give it all to the Emperor for the good of the empire. Lawrence was more than willing to show the Emperor the treasures of the church. He only asked for three days to bring it all together.

During that time, however, Lawrence gathered up the *people* of the church, including the blind, the lame, the orphans, the widows; the very people Jesus ministered to with a ferocious fire of love that would ignite an earth-shattering movement of sacrifice and mercy that would put the encounter

between Elijah and God to shame. Lawrence brought the precious children of God before the Emperor and said the words that embodies his ministry that the whole church still needs to hear thousands of years later. Lawrence said, "These are the treasure of the church." So, I have a feeling if Lawrence, whom the whole church proudly celebrates tomorrow, if he were asked the question, "What are you doing here [including your flat-out willingness to die for it all]?" Lawrence would point to all of you; that you are the true treasure of the church.

"What are you doing here?" would instill some rather interesting responses from us, especially during these coronavirus times, but hopefully, this pandemic has made us realize something that we may have never been fully convinced of before. The treasure of the church is not the physical building or financial assets or Communion vessels. Instead, if God the Father asked Christ, the One who started the entire church movement, to bring the treasures of the church before the divine throne, Jesus would most certainly bring all of you. So, no matter what you may think of yourself today, or the reason why you are here, never forget that, in God's eyes, you are a treasure: a treasure worth dying for, a treasure worth living for still to this day, a treasure that God will absolutely refuse to ever let go; for Lawrence, for you, for all of God's precious children. And so, for you, as that treasure for this and the wider church, we most certainly, together, give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!