



FEAST OF TABERNACLES

“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (Jn 1:14)

The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles (also known as the Feast of Booths) is the most jubilant of all the great Jewish feasts. Still today it fills the streets with a buzz when for seven consecutive days everyone shares in community life in small improvised outdoor booths (uncovered shelters).

The Word of God says: *“Live in temporary shelters for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Lv 23:42-43)*

According to tradition, the booths are built outdoors with the walls made from any material but low enough so that nobody can take cover in their shade. Their canopy should be open enough to be able to gaze at the sky, which is considered to be the true roof of these small shelters and where the clouds and the stars point towards God and towards His revelation throughout the Bible.

Today the Feast of Tabernacles allows the Jews to live for some hours each day, for seven days, away from screens and comforts, sharing family life with intensity in a small space, where the difficulties and unpredictability of the weather are welcomed in a festive atmosphere. At the end the booth is dismantled so that the next year it can be built again, because that's the way their ancestors lived in the desert.

Our shelter

What lessons do the Jewish people learn from all this? And what can we learn too?

We need to make our houses as accessible to neighbors and friends as improvised tents. Do we fill our streets with life? Do we know our neighbors? Do we raise the blinds and open the windows so that people outside are not afraid to get close? Do we let our children play outside and say hello to the passersby? Do we open the gate and take down the “beware of dog” sign?

Whatever our securities may be – our walls – let us not have roofs over our heads, only Heaven. That is where our eyes should draw every day, and in God alone should we trust. Do we really do that?

Our God reveals Himself in clouds and stars – in mystery and in promise, in darkness and in light, in the day and at night. Do we doubt His presence when life gets complicated?

For a few hours each day we need to experience the festivity that is our family, transforming the difficulties we face into laughter, making an effort to share time and space, bringing the young and the old together in the same games, with the sacrifice that this might entail for each one and switching off screens in order to share. So how is our Family Time faring these days?



Our home, our work, our service to our parishes and even our own family, they're all temporary. Because in heaven, as Jesus taught us, these categories don't exist. How have we lived our lives in the world? Have we accumulated "rubbish" that we can't separate ourselves from? Do we find it difficult to give or to loan our things? Are we clinging on to our lives, shunning any challenge that life sends our way, perhaps to move house, country or profession? Are we trying to make our children's life decisions for them or preventing them from taking risks? Are we putting our careers ahead of everything? Do we consider ourselves to be indispensable? Or are we ready each day to echo the prayer of Mother Teresa of Calcutta - a prayer I love to say each day – *"Lord, I take everything you want to give me and give you everything you want to take"*?

The Cana Camping weekend

Although the Feast of Tabernacles is, in the Jewish world, an autumn celebration, our reflection makes good sense in the summertime. We all love to camp out in the summer and it will be in summer that some of us will have the experience of the Cana Camping weekend. But with or without the Cana Camping weekend, or just camping, anyone can take advantage of this time of extra rest and relaxation to reflect on the symbolism of tents. Because our God choose the historical time of nomadism and the historical episode of the crossing of the desert to reveal Himself to the world, offering us the image and the symbol of the tent for our timeless contemplation.

Jesus, the Tent of God with us

Among the tents of the desert, there was one in particular that had the attention of the people. It was the Tent of Meeting where Moses spoke with God. One thousand five hundred years later, St. John would use the image of this tent to speak to us about Jesus: "And the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" says the most faithful translation. Jesus is the true Tent of Meeting because in Him God and man meet and in Him we can all find the Lord. This "Tent of Meeting" is among us each day and in all our paths. We need to turn our eyes towards it each morning, enter into it for an intimate meeting with God and give Him space in the middle of our "campsite".

Commitment

This month, those of us who are preparing for the Cana Camping weekend, let's live in a strong spirit of the nomads, as people who know that life on this earth is a short journey. Let's make our lives a happy "camp", sharing time and space in the summertime which is certainly more relaxed, with everyone who wants to celebrate their "Feast of Tabernacles" with us. And, according to our charism, let's be simple, happy and generous. Most of all, let's have time and space for the "Tent of Meeting" among us.

Amen