

December 4, 2005

The Third Sunday of Advent

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Of the 65 chapters contained in the Books of Chronicles, 19 are devoted to the reign of King David (1 Chronicles 11-29). This bare fact sufficiently indicates the importance of David in the mind of the Chronicler.

But even more significant, I believe, are the concerns that the Chronicler decided to treat within these 19 chapters and how he proportioned those concerns in the narrative. Of these 19 chapters devoted to David, the Chronicler allotted no fewer than 11 to describe that king's solicitude for Israel's proper worship (chapters 14-16, and 22-29). This material includes the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, the organization of the priestly and Levitical ministries, preparations for the sacred music, and David's lengthy instructions to Solomon with respect to the Temple.

According to the Chronicler, David not only made all the arrangements for construction of the Temple and the organization of the worship (1 Chronicles 28:19), he did so by God's own command (2 Chronicles 29:25). Even the musical instruments used in the worship are credited to David (29:27; cf. Nehemiah 12:36).

To grasp the significance of this liturgical emphasis of the Chronicler, it is useful to compare his treatment of David's reign to that in the Books of Samuel. In Samuel there are 77 verses devoted to David's liturgical interests, whereas in the Chronicler there are 323 verses dedicated to this theme. According to the Chronicler, that is to say, David's major importance as an historical figure had to do mainly with his efforts with respect to the divine worship. It was precisely David's work for the temple and its liturgy that rendered him most significant in the history of the People of God.

As the Chronicler could plainly see from looking around him, surveying the circumstances of his own life and times, David's one enduring accomplishment was his singular, unparalleled contribution to Israel's worship. Everything else about David had disappeared from the earth. His battles and conquests were only faint memories. Other details of David's life (such as, for certain, his adultery and murder!) were best forgotten. His hereditary throne had disappeared, like all the other thrones of history. The only thing left that made David a truly important historical figure was the body of his achievements on behalf of Israel's authentic and proper worship of God. David's liturgical accomplishments alone had survived the ravages of history, but for the Chronicler these were quite enough, and his long historical reflection was based upon them.

Following this conviction about David's true place in history, the Chronicler went on to regard the rest of Judah's kings through that same lens. Of the 9 chapters that he devoted to the reign of Solomon, the Chronicler used 6 to tell of the building, appointing, and dedicating the Temple. After all, none of Solomon's other accomplishments had endured. Only his provision for Israel's worship made him a figure of historical consequence.

This theme of the royal patronage of Israel's worship continues through the remainder of the Chronicler's narrative. Only he tells us of the northern Levites who fled to Jerusalem to serve in the Temple during the reign of Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). From the Chronicler alone do we learn of Asa's liturgical reforms (15:8-15), Jehoshaphat's sponsorship of the teaching Levites (17:7-9), and his prayer in the Temple (20:5-12). Only the Chronicler condemns King Uzziah's interference with the priestly ministry of the Temple (26:16-23). He alone describes in detail certain liturgical reforms of Hezekiah (29:12--31:21), Manasseh (33:15-17), and Josiah (35:2-18).

When the Chronicler speaks, then, of "the mercies of David" (*hasde Dawid*--6:42; cf. Psalms 89 [88]:2,3,50; Isaiah 55:3), this expression has specific reference to Israel's worship, especially the liturgy in the Temple. Although David's royal house had not been restored to the throne, the Lord's own House, the Temple, had been rebuilt since the return from exile, and even now it served as the place of His authentic and orthodox worship.

In the Chronicler's time, the final fortunes of the Davidic royal family were still unknown, but this author was yet able to point to its one undeniable historical achievement. David's line had fashioned and equipped Israel's true worship.

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