

The Bible Corner

Cindy Cottone



The Temple of Solomon

Ephraim could feel the excitement in the air as he stared at the huge building. Today was a special day of celebration in Jerusalem. For today, King Solomon was going to dedicate the new temple.

The people of Israel had been waiting for a long, long time for this sacred place in which to worship God. Ephraim's mother had told him all about his ancestors, the Jews. They had started building the temple the same year he had been born, seven years earlier. But the story behind the temple had begun many years before that.

The Israelites had left Egypt, led by Moses, 480 years before Ephraim was born. Then, they had wandered in a desert for 40 years in search of the Promised Land. God had promised them that if they kept His commandments, He would be with them always.

The symbol of this promise was the special wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant. The Ten Commandments that had been given to Moses by God were written on stone tablets and had been carried inside this chest. Ephraim knew the Ten Commandments by heart, because they were an important part of being a Jew.

Throughout the history of the Jews, there had been war with enemies who didn't believe in God. Now, at last, it

was a time of peace for the Jews. And finally, King Solomon was going to have the Ark of the Covenant placed in a special part of the temple.

Ephraim's mother had told him all about the actual building of the temple. The people of Jerusalem were very proud of it and talked of nothing else. The temple had been constructed according to the plans King David had given to his son, Solomon. David had received instructions from God, who told him exactly how the temple was to be built. It was 100 feet long, 33 feet wide and 50 feet high. A 200-foot tower reached up as high as Ephraim could see.

Something else about the whole building project seemed unbelievable to Ephraim. All of the huge quarry stones were cut into just the right shapes before they were brought to the temple site, so there was no noise during the construction!

Once the foundation and walls were up, the walls were covered inside with cedar boards that had been brought from Mount Lebanon. These wooden walls had then been carved with beautiful pictures of flowers and palm trees. The floor of the temple and parts of the walls had been overlaid with pure gold. Two huge bronze pillars stood at

the entrance of the temple, and there was a bronze altar for sacrifices to God.

For several days, Ephraim had kept a close watch on everything. Skilled craftsmen brought in objects of gold, silver and fine linen. Everything had to be perfect for the house of God.

The inner room of the temple was called the Most Holy Place. It was in this room that King Solomon would place the Ark of the Covenant. The inner room was exactly 30 feet long, 30 feet wide and 30 feet high. The walls and ceilings were covered with pure gold, as was the altar that had been made for this room.

King Solomon had instructed the workers to make two identical angels for the Most Holy Place. Ephraim had seen the workers bringing them into the temple. The angels were huge statues 15 feet high, with outspread wings that measured 15 feet from wing tip to wing tip. As you can probably guess, when the angels were placed side by side in the inner room, their wings reached from one side of the room to the other. Ephraim had never seen the inner room because only the priests were permitted to enter it.

The ceremony was about to begin. So many people filled the square that Ephraim could hardly see the temple. His father lifted him high in the air and placed the boy on his shoulders. King Solomon told the priests to bring in the Ark of the Covenant, and they disappeared inside the temple. Ephraim's father told him that the Ark would be placed in the inner room right under the wings of the angels.

A huge feast was about to begin on the grounds just outside the temple. Ephraim watched as King Solomon came forward to speak. The people were very quiet now.

"Today, we gather to dedicate this temple to our God, who has never broken His promise to us," said King Solomon. "Long ago He said, 'If you keep my commandments, then I will dwell among the Sons of Israel and make my home with them forever.' We have built this temple to show God that we will follow His ways and be obedient to Him."

A huge cheer went up from the crowd. Ephraim was glad that he was a Jew and part of this great feast day. The people of Israel now had a home for the Ark of the Covenant and a special place to pray to God.

Jesus makes the same promise to us today. If we choose to follow Him, then He will come and make His home inside our hearts. He will be our friend; He will always help us and never forget us.

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For discussion:

1) Why did the people of Israel want to build a temple?

2) What promise did God make to the people of Israel? What does He promise us today?

3) If Jesus makes His home inside our hearts, do we have to go to church to pray to Him?

For further reading:

1) The story of King Solomon and the building of the temple is found in the Old Testament in 1 Kings 6.

2) "Cathedral: The Story of its Construction" by David Macaulay (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973) is available at the public library. This is a beautiful book about a town in France in the Middle Ages. It is complete with detailed illustrations of the actual construction of a Gothic cathedral that took the townspeople 86 years to finish.

Vatican II observer urges synod to concentrate on women's issues

By Julie Sly

Kansas City, Mo. (NC) — The upcoming extraordinary synod to review Vatican II must concentrate on issues relating to women because "every critical issue in the Church today has to do with women," asserts Sister Mary Luke Tobin.

The 77-year-old Sister of Loretto, who served as an official auditor of the Second Vatican Council (1964-66), was in Kansas City to lecture and give a retreat at the St. Paul School of Theology.

Sister Tobin, director of the Thomas Merton Center for Creative Exchange in Denver, was president of the Sisters of Loretto from 1958-70 and is known nationally for her work in peace and justice issues, and in spiritual formation.

"The teachings of Vatican II and its

message of openness to the future will not be taken back at the synod," Sister Tobin said in an interview with the Kansas City diocesan newspaper, The Catholic Key.

"We're talking about an ecumenical council which included all the bishops of the world vs. a synod which is looking back and reviewing Vatican II," she said. "I think it could be a great, profitable thing, and I hope it will bring out more productive ways of implementing Vatican II among Catholics."

The extraordinary synod, to be held in Rome November 24 through December 8, was called by Pope John Paul II to review the Second Vatican Council. In a recently submitted preparatory report on the American Church, Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, urged the meeting at the Vatican to "give particular

attention to women's role in Church society."

Sister Tobin said, "Almost every controversial issue in the Church — remarriage, divorce, abortion, birth control, ordination of women and others — has to do with women, so I would urge that women be participants in the synod and the decision-making process."

"They should be involved not only as token women as we were at Vatican II — although we were not without effect and served on some commissions — but it was a tiny beginning and much more has to happen," she said.

"Until women are included in decision-making we are going to continue to have problems in the Church because women do not have any voice," she said. "There's a cry of the poor that the Church should listen to, but there's also a cry of women that's not being answered, and I don't know what people are afraid of."

Sister Tobin said that one cannot expect American Catholics to affirm and implement the teachings of Vatican II overnight.

While American Catholics have assimilated Vatican II to varying degrees, she said, the process could be aided by more

reinforcement of the council's teachings through homilies and religious-education programs.

"One of the faults along the way of implementing Vatican II was not to have used the pulpit, our Catholic newspapers and other media as implementation instruments," Sister Tobin said.

In her faith formation work, Sister Tobin detects that Catholics have a growing interest in spiritual direction, and in reading about the Catholic Church and other Christian churches.

"We ought to take heart from these interests among Catholics instead of thinking that people are rejecting their faith," she explained.

The challenge for the American Church in coming years, she said, will be for lay Catholics to take the initiative in implementing the spirit of Vatican II's directives in their own parishes.

"We allow ourselves to too readily become parochialized and don't seek alternatives — lay people are called to a vocation in the Church and need more encouragement and to be willing to take responsible roles," she said.

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