

Homily based on the readings from February 10, 2026 (1 Kings 8.22-23, 27-30; Mark 7.1-13)

If you will allow me a brief moment of personal reflection, today's first reading – from the First Book of Kings – will always hold a special place in my heart. When my father passed away, five years ago this month, he left specific instructions that this passage be read at his funeral. Since my brother – who is a priest of the Diocese of Nashville, Tennessee – was officiating at the ceremony, it fell to me to read this lesson to the congregation.

It would be difficult to explain, without getting into a great deal of family history, why my father selected this particular reading. It is easy to see, though, what this passage ought to mean to the *rest* of us. King Solomon, the anointed successor to the great King David, is offering a prayer of thanksgiving at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. For the Israelites at the time, no object on earth provided clearer evidence of God's boundless mercy and generosity. The Temple served as the

permanent resting place for the Ark of the Covenant – the gold-plated chest containing the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written, along with other holy relics. The Temple complex also housed at least two separate altars – the Altar of Incense and the Altar of Sacrifice – which were essential to the Israelites’ religious rituals. In short, the Temple in Jerusalem served as the visible and tangible connection between the Israelites and their Heavenly Father. When Solomon asks “[c]an it indeed be that God dwells on earth?,” his answer is clearly *yes*: even though God cannot be confined to a single location, he is *uniquely* present to his people in the Temple.

Although the Jewish people have suffered many horrific acts of violence over the years, the most horrendous tragedy they ever endured was the destruction of their Temple – first by the Babylonians and ultimately by the Romans. Since the year 70 AD, when the Second Temple was demolished, the Children of Israel have been unable to offer any form of sacrifice whatsoever. Although Judaism remains one of the most vibrant

spiritual forces in the world, for the past two thousand years it has been afflicted with a deep and irreparable sadness.

Even though we are heirs, in many ways, to the Jewish tradition, one thing we have *not* inherited is this incalculable loss. While it would be wonderful to take a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to visit the Ark of the Covenant, we have our own gold-plated chest right here – not containing the *tablets* of the Law, but the *Lawgiver* himself. We have an altar right here – not for “a yearly remembrance of sins,” but for the one true sacrifice, “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” We can certainly share in Solomon’s joy, but – as we have all heard our Lord proclaim – “there is something greater than Solomon here.” As magnificent as the Temple in Jerusalem was – “one hundred cubits long, fifty wide, and thirty high; ... supported by four rows of cedar columns, with cedar beams upon the columns” – any wooden shack with an altar and a tabernacle achieves and, in fact, exceeds this level of glory.

Whenever *we* ask the question “[c]an it indeed be that God dwells on earth?,” our answer must be emphatically *yes*: the Lord *is* present here

among us – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – *at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time.*