

IN HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

Today's Text: Jn 14: 1- 6

Extracts:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. *In My Father's house are many mansions*; if it were not so, I would have told you. *I go to prepare a place for you*. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; *that where I am, there you may be also...*” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” [Jn 14: 1-6]

In July 1998, a Nigerian community organization based in Southern California held a reception in honour of Chief Anthony Enahoro (1923-2010), one of the few respected politicians and pro-democracy crusaders in Nigeria's turbulent political history. At 21, he was already the editor of a major Nigerian mass-circulation newspaper that gave hell to the then British colonial government. He is credited with being the first parliamentarian to move a motion for Nigeria's independence (from British colonial rule).¹ I had the privilege to sit next to him at that 1998 Los Angeles reception and that was when he confirmed to me a story that I had heard about him years back. He was the firstborn of twelve children. Soon after he went into politics, he visited home at Uromi (then part of the Western Region but now in Edo State) to see his very strict father. The senior Enahoro did not admire some of the new mannerisms of the young politician. So, he told his son to get out of his house. The junior Enahoro replied, “No, I am in my father's house. You go to your father's house!”

As his father's first son, the young Enahoro had as much claim to that house as his father who might have actually inherited it from his father! But what was the quarrel all about? Was it about the mansion (piece of property) or the name (family image)? In this week's Bible story, Jesus told His disciples that there are many mansions in His Father's house and He was going there ahead of them to prepare a place for them (and all believers). Like young Enahoro, Jesus has laid full claims to His Father's house and He is inviting us with authority to live with Him there forever. What does that mean? What will qualify us to be assigned one of those mansions in His Father's house? Those questions and more are the issues that we shall examine in this week's exciting study.

¹ “Anthony Enahoro,” From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Enahoro

1. Introduction: A House is bigger than a Mansion!

A popular Spanish phrase states “*Mi casa es su casa*” (my house is your house). If you were to say that to a family member like children, it would be taken for granted. However, to an American visitor to Mexico, such an invitation from his/her host could be interpreted as “feel at home.” Thus, there is a close connection between “house” and “home.” Before we go into this week’s Bible text, it may be helpful for us to examine it.

An average house consists of the *hardware* (building and equipment, including furnishing) and the *software* (the human beings who live in it).² Unless building codes prevent it, human beings like to express their uniqueness through the design and finishing of their houses. The shape and size of houses in highbrow, low density neighbourhoods are markedly different from the cramped and same looking houses that you may find in inner city projects. Even within urban areas, people would still want to reflect their individuality. For example, in Dublin, Republic of Ireland, no two front doors of apartments in the same building are painted alike! Therefore, to a large extent, *stars occupy houses*. Stars are *individuals* (if single occupiers) or *parents* or *siblings*. The fight for territorial integrity is rife. For example, the man wants to be the unquestioned boss, his wife resents it and fights back and the children suffer the consequences or contribute their crises. Issues are always centred on *rights* and *entitlements*. As a result, loneliness, selfishness, alienation, domestic violence, abuse, separation and divorce, among others, are quite common. Such a house cannot stand.

However, when the stars subordinate themselves to the general good of all, team spirit is created, which leads to building a home. In a home, everybody is his/her brother’s keeper, so to speak. There is open communication. There is consultation. Collaboration and cooperation, concern and caring radiate. All these create an enabling environment of *shared love*. Then, the home becomes the training ground for children, a city of refuge for the prodigal, and a sanctuary for the distressed. Such a home can withstand any storms of life.

But as we examine the reality around us, we find the following settings, among others:

- a) *You may have a house but not a home!*

In this case, you have a *physical place of abode*, no matter how grand or lowly. However, there is *no life in it!* You may be able to afford all that money can buy but you are miserable and sad because you lack what money cannot buy- joy, peace of mind, etc. You are ready to trade your mansion for that which you lack. For example, Abram (later known as Abraham) was rich in livestock, silver and gold [Gen. 13: 2]. Yet, he said

² Taken from “A House is not a Home,” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 5, No. 27: 26 Sept. 2004; pp. 2-3; http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_5/PDFs/27_Ahouseisnotahome.pdf

to God, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” [Gen. 15: 2]. Therefore, ***that you own a mansion does not mean that you have a house as long as it is not a home!***

b) *You may have a home but not a house!*

Sometimes, we have been forced by circumstances to live on the street as ***homeless*** people or in shelters. We may have lost our houses to floods, fire or religious/ethnic disturbances. Our circumstances may be temporary or permanent. ***But we have family and friends who love us to fall back on.*** So, instead of being sad and lonely, we are at peace with ourselves. For example, in our cities, most of the people who live under the bridge or in mosquito-ridden squalors may sleep soundly at night while those of us who live in pent houses toss around on the bed all night with nightmares! Nevertheless, people who lack houses still envy those who live in mansions or exhibit the affluence that they lack.

In The Temptations (1971) top hit, *Papa was a rolling stone*, they sang somewhere, “Wherever he laid his head was his home!” But the song was not meant to commend Papa! When someone came to Jesus, he said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.” Jesus replied him, “Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” [Lk 9: 57-58]. Do you think that was the answer that the questioner expected?

c) *Only God’s house is both a house and a home!*

It almost seems that *as human beings*, we can never have it both ways. Money cannot buy us a mansion that lasts forever or love or peace of mind. For example, after David had become king of Israel, we are told, “there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. But David grew stronger and stronger and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker” [2 Sam. 3: 1]. Overtime, David’s house also grew weaker. In due time, his descendants went into captivity in Babylon and later into oblivion. Therefore, ***human effort cannot guarantee you a house and a home that can last forever.*** That is why the word of God says, “Through *wisdom* a house is built, and by *understanding* it is established; by *knowledge* the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” [Prov. 24: 3-4]. Wisdom and knowledge are gifts of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12:8]!

Only God’s house is both a house and a home. As a house, it is a place and it is called the kingdom of heaven [Matt. 18: 3] where God’s throne is [Is. 66: 1]. As a home, it is called the kingdom of God [Lk 18: 24-25] which is characterized by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

[Rom. 14: 17]. *Your hometown is where you were born, not necessarily where you live. Therefore, to enter the kingdom of heaven (your spiritual hometown in God's house), you must have the kingdom of God (your spiritual birth certificate)!* That is the point that Jesus is making in this week's study.

2. Features of God's House

Jesus assured His listeners, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you ... that where I am, there you may be also" **[Jn 14: 1-3]**. Before we get carried away, let us understand the features of God's house covered in our Lord's promises. They are as follows:

a) *It is a final resting place*

His Father's house is a final resting place for the saints when they are called home into eternal rest, just as hell is the final resting place for the wicked. In the words of Jesus, there are many mansions there **[v. 2]**. A mansion is a big and rich house. Everyone seems to receive a mansion because, in the words of Jesus Himself, the least in God's kingdom is greater than John the Baptist and yet, there is no one born of woman who is greater than he **[Matt. 11: 11]**.

Such a mansion is worth aspiring for because those who lay up their treasures in heaven have put such wealth beyond the reach of moths and thieves. Such people knew their priorities while they were on earth **[Matt. 6: 19-20]**. But what are you doing right now? Are you working so hard to build up fat bank accounts or huge mansions in order to get the praise of those you regard as your Joneses? Are you pursuing political or organizational power with such consummate zeal that nothing else matters? When last did you read your local newspapers to see the obituaries of your contemporaries who have died prematurely? What if you were to lay all your treasures in ephemeral things while leaving your soul in the wicked hands of Satan and his angels? Where do you want to spend your eternity when the final bell tolls for you? Think!

b) *Meant only for those who believe in Christ Jesus*

Thomas, one of the disciples, asked Jesus how they could know the way when they did not know where He was going. Jesus replied, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me" **[Jn 14: 6]**. That makes it quite clear that there is no other way to go about it. Jesus the Christ is the only begotten Son of God that came in human form to die for our sins **[Jn 3: 16]**. He is the image of the invisible God and "by Him, all things were created that are in heaven and that are

on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” [Col. 1: 15-16]. It follows that He should have an important say in who can be admitted to His Father’s house.

In 1991, a Nigerian Muslim friend and professional colleague challenged me on Christ’s claim as the only way to God. There was no way I could explain it to convince him. So, I challenged him to pray and ask God to open his understanding. A few days later, he came back to me, looking quite subdued. He said that soon after our discussion, he had a dream in which he tried to climb up an elevated platform that had only one narrow bridge way. Huge beings in white apparels (presumably angels) stood all around the elevated platform and at the top of the bridge way stood a man. Since there were so many people struggling to reach the top through the narrow bridge way, my friend climbed up the fence away from the crowd. Just as he came close to the top of the fence, one of the huge beings said to him, “Sir, you can only get in through the bridge way.” My friend asked who was the man at the head of the bridge way and he was told, “He is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to God except through Him.” My friend woke trembling because those were the exact words of Christ that he had disputed! He is today one of the most zealous born-again brothers that I know. You cannot enter Jesus the Christ’s Father’s house without His consent! You cannot make heaven by human or own effort or even by religion.

c) *Tenancy there begins from here*

Jesus told His disciples, “You believe in God, believe also in Me” [Jn 14: 1]. **Belief or faith is for the living; not for the dead!** For example, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus [Lk 16: 19-31], it was too late for the rich man already in hell to repent. So he begged Abraham to send somebody from the dead to go and preach to his five brothers on earth to repent “lest they also come to this place of torment.” Abraham said to him, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” Moses and the prophets stand for the Scriptures and the risen Christ once told His disciples, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” [Lk 24: 44].

The word of God is clear that only those who believe in Jesus have the right to be called the sons and daughters of God [Jn 1: 12]. They have received the Spirit of adoption by which they can call God “Abba. Father.” They become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ [Rom. 8L 14-17]. Therefore, you can only obtain the certificate of occupancy to your mansion in heaven when you accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour while you are still here on earth. After death, no number of

requiem masses can do it for you because it is appointed to man once to die and after death, judgment [**Heb. 9: 27**].

3. Conclusion: Are you ready to go home?

A young worker never thinks of retirement because it looks so far away. Then sooner than later, retirement comes and it is too late to plan for it. In like manner, most of us think of physical death as something that happens only to others, hardly themselves. Whether you like it or not, death knocks at your door each day! So, the best attitude is to get ready to go home anytime.

The apostle Paul shows us the right attitude. Writing to the Corinthian church, he said [**2 Cor. 5: 1-2**]:

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.

In Africa, when elders die abroad, their bodies are returned to their hometowns for burial, just as Israel (Jacob) who died in Egypt was buried in Canaan [**Gen. 50: 1-13**]. When you became born again, you were able to see and enter the kingdom of God [**Jn 3: 3,5**]. From that day on, heaven became your hometown and country. Until you are called home, you are now Christ's ambassador on earth [**2 Cor. 5: 20**]. In that capacity, Christ now lives in you [**2 Cor. 13:5**]. You are now to treat the house of God, your place of worship, as a house of prayer, not a den of thieves [**Jer. 7: 10-11; Matt. 21: 13**]. Your body has become the temple of the Holy Spirit which you can no longer afford to pollute [**1 Cor. 6: 19**]. Therefore, let not your heart be troubled any longer. Jesus has prepared a mansion for you in His Father's house. In due course, you will receive the keys to it. Happily, it is not your corpse that will go there. It is your immortal body that will live there forever.

Congratulations!