

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

RESPECTING THE SACRED

SUNDAY READINGS:

Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12

Psalms 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9

1 Corinthians 3:9, 11, 16-17

John 2:13-22

KEEPING GOD'S TEMPLE HOLY

Our reflection begins with an interesting question: Did Jesus ever get angry? Today's Gospel gives a clear answer. Yes, Jesus became angry when he saw something that was sacred being desecrated. And, he took decisive action; he made a whip out of cords and forcefully drove all the vendors and money-changers

out of the temple area. Yes, Jesus displayed righteous anger!

It is noteworthy that a description of Jesus cleansing the temple appears in all four gospels (Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-17; Lk 19:45-46; Jn 2:13-16). Quite obviously, these passages reflect a verified historical event in Jesus' life, although each of the four evangelists provide varying nuances. Jesus is asserting that holy things must be respected and revered.

Holy Pillars. One can validly assert that there are four foundational pillars that support the temple and make it holy. First, there is the *Didache*, the Church's teaching received from the apostles through the scriptures and Church tradition. Thus, when the community gathers to worship it experiences the scripture readings, the catechesis, and the homily, all as major opportunities for the handing down of the Gospel of Christ and for a full encounter with Christ, the Word Incarnate.

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The second pillar is the breaking of the bread, the Eucharist. We recall that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread and “their eyes were opened” (Lk 24:31). Vatican II asserts that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the life and mission of the Church. We, the faithful, receive through the Church, “the Bread of Life from the table both of God’s Word and Christ’s Body” (DV 21). Word and Eucharist “form but one single act of worship” (SC 56).

Additional Pillars. God’s house has “prayers” as one of its pillars. Thus, in addition to the Eucharistic celebration, we Christians have prayers throughout the day: morning, midmorning, midday, midafternoon, evening, and at night. This practice is not only for the religious and the ordained; it is for all Christians. It is our tradition that several times a day, Christians pause for a moment to pray using personal reflections, hymns, psalms, and inspired songs.

A fourth pillar is *koinonia*, community fellowship. For Saint Paul, there can be no Eucharist in a community whose members do not love one another. Not just any kind of gathering, the Eucharist is fellowship with Christ and in Christ. To become brother, sister, or mother to Christ, is to “hear the Word of God and put it into practice” (Lk 8:21). Hearing the Word and acting on it in genuine *koinonia*, in fellowship, is what gives solidity to the temple, God’s house.

Conclusion. The Church, the new temple that God has built in Jesus Christ, is meant to be a home, not just to Christians but to the whole world. That is what it means to be Catholic, to be inclusive, to be open to everyone, especially the last, the least, and the lost. In God’s new temple, the Church, built solidly on four pillars, there are many rooms, much open space. Thus, members need to keep an open, missionary mind and an open, compassionate heart towards others!

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading - Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12: Our Old Testament reading today is from the prophet Ezekiel; it describes how living water flows out from the temple and enriches everything it touches. Symbolically, we could see this image representing the multiple rich benefits flowing from the cross of Christ, nourishing everyone that is touched with God's enduring, faithful love.

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9: Although this psalm does not use the exact phrase "living water," the imagery evokes the dynamic presence of God, the Holy Spirit, in our lives. Through the Spirit we experience God's grace which waters our lives and gladdens our hearts; this "divine water" is a constant source of joy and strength in our daily lives.

Second Reading - I Corinthians 3:9, 11, 16-17: In today's passage Paul provides two spiritual lessons, using the image of a building. First, we are to build our lives as a quality structure erected on the solid foundation who is Christ. Secondly, Paul asks us to meditate on the beautiful reality that each of us is a holy temple of God.

Gospel - John 2:13-22: Our Gospel today describes Jesus' cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem; he drives out the merchants and money changers who had desecrated the temple by turning it into a marketplace. Jesus is also foreshadowing his own resurrection, when he will be bodily raised after three days in the tomb. We recall that each time we profess our faith using the Apostles' Creed, we affirm our faith in "the resurrection of the body."

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who has recently published ***Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language*** (Orbis Books) as well as ***Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights*** and ***A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis*** (Faith Alive Books).

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