

In Nomine Iesu

Midweek Lent 5 2024

I will raise up this temple in three days - Mark 15:25-47

“And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, ‘The King of the Jews. And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!’ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.’ Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

“And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, ‘Behold, he is calling Elijah.’ And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.’ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’

“There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Mag-dalene, and Mary the mother

of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

“And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.”

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Two weeks ago we heard that the principal charge against Jesus when He was put on trial before the high priest was whether He had claimed that the Jerusalem temple would be destroyed and in three days He would raise it up again. But, as St. Mark noted, the witnesses couldn't agree about exactly what Jesus had said. However, for the members of the High Council there was something about the temple being destroyed and in three days Jesus raising it up again that unnerved them. Interestingly, this is the only recorded charge against Jesus in His trial before the Caiaphas. It was the charge the priests, scribes, and elders concentrated on.

It was only when Caiaphas, the high priest asked Jesus directly, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”, that everything changed and they all seized upon His agreement to this as their justification for condemning Him to death.

However, it would seem that the priests, elders, and scribes knew in their hearts Jesus’ assertion that He would raise the temple up in three days was central to what He had been preaching and teaching for the whole of the three years throughout Israel since He first spoke those words. Why should He, they thought, have such things to say about the temple. That is our responsibility under God. This Jesus is just an uneducated carpenter’s son from Nazareth. But His talk about the temple made them uncomfortable, threatened them, troubled their consciences. And they hated Him for it.

This evening’s reading shows us that the members of the Jewish Council, even though they had condemned Him for saying that He was the Messiah, the Son of God and had already obtained the death sentence from Pilate’s court for Jesus claiming to be a king, were still fixated on the charge that He would raise the temple up from destruction in three days. So, here they are at Jesus’ crucifixion still deriding and mocking Him, sneering, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” What was it that so focused the anger of the elders of Israel on this point?

You know, it is a curious trait of the human character that we sometimes oppose loudly and publicly the thing that causes us to question and doubt ourselves most deeply, as if in doing so we can drown out the inner voice of our own conscience, our own better judgment. That may well have

been the case with the members of the Sanhedrin that day they watched the promised Messiah suffer and die before their eyes. Consider this, the priests and Levites must have witnessed thousands of sacrifices as they carried out their duties in and around the temple. Sheep and goats, doves and pigeons, bulls from the Day of Atonement sacrifice - they had seen all of it very many times over the years. Needless to say, that for many of them the sight of blood had lost its shock value. It certainly did not sober them into silence to see Jesus' bleeding on the cross now. No, it would appear that the greater His agony the more frenzied they became as they hurled more and more insults at Him.

But when the sky grew dark at noon they knew something unusual was afoot. When the unnatural darkness persisted for an hour, then two, then three, they grew apprehensive. Then Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Doubts clutched at their throats, the sense of foreboding grew, and they fell silent, uncertain. Then He said loudly for all to hear, "It is finished," and the spectacle was done; and they began to leave in uncomfortable silence, one after the other. Some of them probably went home, but others to the temple to prepare. When those who returned to the temple discovered that the curtain barring the way to the Holy of Holies had been torn in two from top to bottom, opening the way to the space reserved for Ark and its mercy seat, what did they think? Did it dawn on them that they really had been onto something important? Did it still nag at them that there was something troubling about this, about the connection between Jesus and the temple. What had Jesus actually said about raising the temple up after three days? What did He mean?

The thief on Jesus' right and the Roman soldier at the foot of His cross came to their own conclusions, perhaps not about what Jesus meant by raising up the temple after three days, but certainly about whether He was or was not in fact the Son of the Blessed, the Christ. And there were others, as Mark recorded, who were moved to say and do something:

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Dear friends, the curtain in the temple had been torn in two from top to bottom so that whichever priest had gone into the holy place that evening to light the altar of incense, as Zechariah once did some thirty years and more earlier, would have seen not an angel, as Zechariah had, but seen into the very holy of holies itself, something permitted only to the high priest. What did **that priest say** to the people outside gathered for prayer that evening? What did he say

to his fellow priests? Who was he? We do not know. The Scriptures do not say. Was it Joseph? Was it Nicodemus? Or was it simply another priest who at least had the honesty to tell others what he saw so that the fact of the tearing of the temple curtain would spread, heard, and be recorded as Mark and other gospel writers did?

Believing hearts in the days and weeks that followed that first Good Friday, the years and centuries, perceived that the temple and Jesus were intimately connected as only the shadow and the reality could be. Dear friends, may these Lenten meditations on the passion and death of the Savior draw you to the same connection between Old Testament temple and the temple raised three days later on the first Easter morning. Amen

Soli Deo Gloria