

## Temples built by toil & for testimony

**33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Year – Cycle C – 17 November 2007**

**Readings:** Mal 4:1-2a; 2 Thess 3:7-12; Lk 21:5-19 –

*“Your endurance will win you your lives” (Lk)*

### **Three Significant Signposts:**

1. Approaching the dusk of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Year C) liturgical season, the readings sound more sombre and point towards the end-times, so as to set us reflecting on what’s important and everlasting in our lives, and what’s not. The gospel reading has the Temple of Jerusalem as its context; and so we could focus our attention on how we live our lives since we are created in God’s image and likeness and are ‘temples of the Holy Spirit’. Prophet Malachi—whose name in Hebrew means ‘God’s messenger’—calls his people to walk along the paths of righteousness. He preached around the year 450 BC to the Babylonian exiles who had returned from enduring harrowing experiences on alien soil. Thus, although one would expect them to live better, repentant lives, they were once again wayward in their dealings with God and their fellow human beings. Consequently, in the light of the future coming of the Day of the Lord, Malachi’s message is both, one of caution and of consolation. On the one hand, he cautions evildoers who foolishly live arrogant, selfish lives—they will be burned like stubble; and, on the other hand, he consoles the righteous who live in holy fear of God—they will experience the warmth of God’s love since, “the sun of righteousness will shine with healing in its rays.”
2. The Gospel passage begins with the believers marveling at the mighty, magnificent Temple of Jerusalem, which was the centre of Jewish worship. Greatly esteemed as a visible, worthy dwelling place of the invisible, eternal God, it stood sturdy, imposing, indestructible and almost timeless like the God believed to inhabit it. However, Jesus puts things in right perspective and distinguishes between means and ends, temporal and eternal, destructible and indestructible. Of the Temple, he predicts, “the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down” (v.6). Let’s remember that such a malediction from Jesus’ mouth would be quite shocking for his hearers since it took Herod 50 years to renovate the Temple to its original glory as built by King Solomon five centuries earlier. Begun in the year 26 B.C., the renovation had just been completed when Jesus’ disciples and other devotees express great awe at the impressive stonework. However, Jesus was not imagining things when he spoke of the destruction of this Temple of Jerusalem; for within 40 years, the Romans would quell the Barsabbus revolt and completely destroy the Temple in the year 70 AD, leaving only what the Christians often call the ‘Wailing Wall’—or, the ‘Western Wall’—still standing.
3. Shocked at what Jesus predicts of the destruction of the Temple, the people ask him: “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” (v.7). In answer, Jesus cautions them: “Beware that you are not led astray ...” and then warns them about being swayed by false prophets and fanatic sects that will claim to speak in his name. Jesus also uses so-called ‘eschatological’ or end-time language: national uprisings, earthquakes, famines, plagues, dreadful portents and great signs from heaven

(vv.9-11). Bible scholars are undecided as to what extent these are exactly Jesus' words and how much has been edited by the evangelist who expected the end of the world to be imminent. Notably, even today, we have doomsday prophets and fanatic sects who aggressively proselytize and 'forcibly convert' people to their paths and *panths* using frightening language and scary symbols. Would Jesus approve of all this? And, does Jesus himself intend to be fanatical, fatalistic and futuristic? Not at all! Rather, apart from advising us: "refuse to join them!" he also gives us a comforting reassurance: "This will give you an opportunity to testify. So, make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict" (vv.13-15). Jesus wants you and me to testify about him before those who oppose him with his calm assurance: "I am with you."

### **Linking the Second Reading to the Theme:**

In Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians he expresses affection for them and praises their faith and good works. However, there are some of them who are lazy, idle, and shun work. Paul advises these "to imitate us" (the apostolic teachers) who, over and above earning their daily bread through hard toil, spent much time to proclaim Good News to all. Indeed, Paul 'walks the talk' by practising his own trade, tent-making, while catechizing the Thessalonians. Hard work has great witness value besides helping individuals and communities to support themselves.

### **Contextual Temple Concern:**

The *mandir-masjid* concern: Last week, November 9, five judges of the Supreme Court overruled previous decisions about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> land sharing among the groups that were in conflict for over 25 years and ruled that the entire disputed *mandir-masjid* site, be entirely handed over to build a Ram Mandir as per beliefs of the majority community. There is foreboding that other 'disputed sites'—including some churches in India—allegedly built upon shrines of yesteryears will have to handed over in order to bring about peace and harmony in India. What do you think?

**Point for Reflection:** Today, we are increasingly familiar with the persecution of Christians not only worldwide; but concretely in many regions—especially in remote villages—in India. What if each and every church or chapel is destroyed on account of Man-made or natural tragedies? Would Indian Christianity die an un/natural death? Not likely. Jesus forewarns us when he points to himself as the temple (Jn 2:19) and Paul describes us as "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19). Thus, amid the darkness and death we see around us, each of us is called to give '*witness*' to God by being another Christ: God's temple. The word '*witness*' come from the Greek, *marturia*, from where we get the English 'martyr'. Has the time come for many more Indian-Christians—especially shepherds—to undergo martyrdom for their flock and for God?

**An Apt Story:** Three stonecutters were breaking stones for building a temple. When asked what they were doing, one grumpily said, "I'm breaking stones!" Said the second, "I'm working for wages to support my family." Singing as he sweated, the third said, "I'm building God's temple!" While all three were doing the same work, only one enjoyed it, working for the sheer joy of building for God, with God. Wouldn't we be building God's temple if we toiled harder and gave witness—like Paul—by '*being*' Good News to all those we meet?

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