

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome – Year C

Today's readings focus on the idea of temple as the dwelling place of the divine. The prophet Ezekiel points to the restored temple in Jerusalem as a symbol of God's presence and for Paul and John, Jesus himself is the new temple, the ultimate fulfilment of divine promises.

Ezekiel 47:1–2, 8–9, 12 The prophet Ezekiel lived through the period of the Babylonian exile, when the leading citizens of Jerusalem and their families were transported as captives to Babylon. The Babylonians had established an empire stretching from the Persian Gulf, north through the lands of Mesopotamia, western Turkey, and south through Syria, Lebanon. Israel and parts of Egypt around the northern reaches of the Nile.

Ezekiel saw this Babylonian invasion coming, and prophesied that Israel would fall as a punishment from God for the corruption that had characterized successive Israelite administrations. The first 24 chapters of the book warn of approaching invasion. Ezekiel lived through this catastrophe and was part of the exiled Jewish community in Babylon.

The last 15 chapters of the book offer consolation to the exiles, assuring them that God will restore them to their homeland and establish a line of good kings. Today's extract is a visionary description of the reconstructed temple in Jerusalem. From the new temple will flow water to give life to the land and fruit trees and crops and the river will provide fish for the people.

The vision is meant to paint a picture of future prosperity during the restoration of the land of Israel and the return of the exiles. This new life flows from the temple, that is, from the holy place, the hand of God, which is the source of all Israel's abundance.

Psalms 46:2–3, 5–6, 8–9 This psalm gives us the metaphor that God is a fortress protecting Israel from its enemies. The downside of the metaphor is that it has been interpreted as a guarantee that God is on the side of Israel and not their enemies. Over the centuries this has, at times, led to xenophobia on the part of Israel and Christians who boasted that they were above their enemies.

The spirit of the psalm is that God will be a protector for all people who walk in the way of the Lord. No nation or church can claim superiority over others.

1 Corinthians 3:9c–11, 16–17 The context of today's reading is Paul addressing divisions in the Corinthian church. It was common in ancient Greek society for people to ally themselves to a leader or to the teachings of a certain philosopher and this phenomenon has surfaced in the Corinthian church. Some say they follow Paul, others Cephas (Peter) or Apollos, Paul's colleague from Alexandria, but Paul is trying to get it into their heads that all of these people are messengers, servants (Gk. *diakonoi*) of Jesus Christ. It is Christ they should be devoted to, not to any of his servants.

The foundation of the Christian community is Jesus Christ

Paul uses the metaphor of a building to describe the Christian community. He sees himself as the planner and foundation layer and other leaders after him as builders adding to the foundation. He is picking up the metaphor from his own Jewish tradition where Israel is portrayed as God's planting and temple. The Dead Sea Scrolls also contain references to Israel as God's temple. The difference, of course, is that the foundation of the Christian community is Jesus Christ.

In the spirituality of so many ancient religions the temple represented the dwelling of the god or goddess among the people. Paul is drawing on this analogy to point out that the community that is faithful to the spirituality of Jesus Christ has the Spirit of God dwelling in it. As Paul sees it, the community (Gk. *ekklesia*) that is loyal to Christ is home to the Spirit.

Paul goes on to make the point that all members of the *ekklesia* should work to maintain unity in their devotion to Christ. There is no room for divisions in the community and those who mistreat their fellow community members will put themselves offside with God.

John 2:13–22 A good number of English translations put this passage under the heading of the cleansing of the Temple or something similar. Others describe it as Jesus and/in the Temple to give it a less tendentious title. Jesus did not 'cleansed' the temple of commercial activity since it was the

custom for the buying and selling of animals for sacrifice to take place in the temple precinct. In fact, this commerce was a necessity if the laws of Torah regarding sacrifices were to be obeyed.

The money changers were also necessary because animals bought for sacrifice as well as the obligatory temple tax had to be paid for with Tyrian coins, which had no image on them. Ordinary coins used in Israel during the Roman occupation had the emperor's image on them and so were forbidden in the temple. They had to be changed for Tyrian coins.

John is presenting Jesus as a great liberator

In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, who place this incident toward the end of Jesus' career, John has it at the beginning of Jesus' public mission. It occurs just after Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding in Galilee through which he was presented by John as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. Now he has come to Jerusalem at the time of Passover, the feast of the liberation of the Jews from Egypt. John is presenting Jesus as a great liberator.

Scholars have discussed the timing difference over centuries and some have argued that this incident may well have occurred twice – one at the beginning and one at the end of Jesus' mission. However, a true appreciation of the symbolism underlying the whole of John's gospel makes it fairly clear that it happened only once. John puts it at the beginning of Jesus' mission to highlight that Jesus is the endpoint of Hebrew prophecy and the fulfilment of the Mosaic tradition. His arrival on the scene is about fulfilment.

The other three gospels have Jesus quoting Scripture saying that the buyers and sellers have turned the house of God into a den of thieves but John has Jesus say, 'Stop turning my Father's house into a market.' It is an allusion to Zechariah 14:20-21 which describes the day when God will dwell in Jerusalem and there will no longer be a need for sacrifices and, equally, no need for the market of buying and selling animals.

The action of Jesus upsetting the commerce in the temple represents a disruption of one of the most significant feasts of the Jewish year. It is a symbolic action that anticipates the end of the Jewish sacrificial system. In John, the action of Jesus looks forward to the time when Jesus will offer the ultimate sacrifice of himself as the perfect Passover lamb.

Putting all this together we can see how Paul and John both see Jesus as the new temple, the dwelling place of the divine and the focal point of all that we need for salvation. A firm commitment to Jesus and his formula for quality living is our takeaway from these readings.



'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

John 13:35 (NRSV)



After going to the doctor a man popped into his local for a whiskey.

'What's up mate?' asked his friend, 'you look worried.'

'Yeah, I am,' he said. 'I've just been to the doctor and he told me I can't play football.'

'Oh, really?' said his mate. 'He's seen you play, then.'

Laurie Woods