

Luke 21:5-19 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer amen.

Our reading from Luke's gospel starts with the disciples discussing how beautiful their temple looked with its fine stones and the ornamental cladding of gold dedicated to God.

It was that comment on the splendour of the Temple that prompted Jesus to prophesy on it's future.

The temple in Jerusalem was the most magnificent building imaginable, it was indeed one of the marvels of the ancient world, and to the disciples it was unthinkable that the glory of the Temple should be reduced to ruins.

But Jesus' Prophecy in verse 6 about not one stone being left upon another turned out to be very accurate, as indeed we would expect it to be.

In AD 70 the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, but before they could complete their siege they had to capture the temple, which proved very difficult so they set fire to the roof forcing the defenders out.

That's why there was not a single stone left on top of another, because in the fire the gold melted and got in between the stones, so to recover the gold every stone had to be taken down.

But for me the real question isn't when was it destroyed, but why did God allow it to be destroyed, and was its destruction necessary.

The temple, for the Jews, was where God could be found, and it was where the Jews performed sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins, but Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day made all future sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins unnecessary and obsolete.

We all know from our bibles that there was a conflict going on between the Jews on the one hand, and Jesus on the other who was trying to change the stubborn hearts of an unrepentant Judaism on the other.

And initially it looked as if the Jews had won the day, since Jesus had been captured, tried and crucified, but their triumph was short lived, because as Jesus had already told them, 'destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up'.

Jesus of course, as we know, was speaking of the temple of his body', that is his resurrected body, his mystical body, which is the church, which is all of us, we are his body, and now God dwells in us, not in a temple.

So that is why God permitted the temple to be destroyed because it was no longer relevant, because through the death and resurrection of Jesus our sins are covered, and through the power of the Holy Spirit God lives in us.

Sometimes when I sin and ask for forgiveness, which of course is the right thing to do, I think that Jesus couldn't possibly forgive that one, but then I remember that Jesus has already forgiven me through his death on the cross, we were all saved 2,000 years ago.

But that doesn't mean that we will not sin again and again and one of the devils lies is to tell us every time we sin that we are failures, but we are not failures, we are sinners, and it was for sinners that Jesus gave up his life; so ignore the devil, repent and stay faithful to Christ.

But let us move on because there are some other Christian principles out lined in our reading, which we should also think about, and which will help us in our Christian life.

Firstly Jesus could read the signs of the future.

The Jews, which also included the disciples couldn't see the approaching disaster that was to befall the temple, but Jesus could, he could see the destruction of the temple and also the suffering of the people.

And it will be through prayerfully reading the bible that we too will also be able to see through the eyes of God, albeit dimly, then we too will be able to see better the suffering of the people in our generation, and be more inclined to help them.

Secondly Jesus was being very honest, he was saying that if you follow me the chances are that this is what is likely to happen to you, so from verse 9 to the end of our reading we hear about wars and insurrections, about arrests and persecutions.

But these things are not only going to happen to them they are also going to happen to us as well, it is also us he is referring too.

Now it so happens that unless something extraordinary happens very quickly we, in this country, are unlikely to be persecuted for our faith, but that doesn't mean that we are not in danger, far from it.

Our danger could well be the lack of persecution, it may well be that a bit of persecution could well sharpen up our faith; our biggest danger could well be the good life and apathy.

It has often been said that the way to strengthen anything is to exercise it; Olympic athletes must practice every hour of the day, and every day of the week, if they are serious about winning medals; the same goes for our faith, if it is never challenged or stretched it will never grow.

So what is our challenge; well it could be to ensure that Christianity is passed on to the next generation, and I refer us back to our series of sermons on mission and the difference between a maintenance shaped church a mission shaped church which is outward looking, embraces necessary change to stay relevant to the community it serves.

And arguably the most important missionary work of this church is the missionary work we do as individual Christians in our community, in our families and with our friends, and the way we show our love for Jesus demonstrated by the way we live out our lives.

Passing on Christianity, or our Christian faith, to the next generation is the most important job that any Christian can do.

Or it could be to help those Christians who are persecuted, by praying for them, or it could be to obey Christ and feed the poor by giving food to the food banks, or it could be nearer home, by supporting the Sandhurst Community Care scheme which needs our help.

It is up to each of us to respond to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as he directs us; obedience to the Holy Spirit is everyone's duty and challenge.

As baptized Christians we're all filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and it's no good having the best adviser at our elbow if we don't take any notice of him.

Thirdly Jesus promised that his disciples would never have to face their problems alone. Jesus said in verse 15 I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

If we are prepared to stand by Jesus then Jesus will stand by us and not only stand by us, but he will in the end give us victory over all our trials and opponents.

One of the great lessons Christians are to learn is that faith is the antidote to fear, that God can be trusted, and that God is in control.

And this is despite what we might hear or read about on the news about what's happening in the world; God is in control. So if anyone is fearful, or in trouble, first turn to God and God will give us all that we need, and remember what St Paul wrote to the Romans.

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

And following on from that Jesus said at the end of our reading, “Not a hair of your head will perish”. A person who walks with Christ may lose his life but he can never lose his soul.

Let us meditate for a moment on how we can serve or respond to the Lord in our lives, and then we will finish with a short prayer written by St Ignatius Loyola

Teach us, Lord, to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to seek for any reward
save that of Knowing that we do your will.

Amen