

A HOUSE OF PRAYER OR A DEN OF ROBBERS?

“And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, ‘It is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you made it a den of robbers.”

Matthew 21:12,13

REFLECTION

The cleansing of the temple is about the only place in the Bible when we see Jesus being angry. We can understand why. The temple is supposed to be a holy place where people would gather for worship. It is a place which should be primarily associated with spiritual renewal, and faith-related activities like personal and corporate prayer, confession, and contemplation.

Those who attend religious services should approach God with right spirit and a contrite heart, as the Psalmist has counselled - *“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted; He saves the contrite heart.”* (Psalms 34:18)

Unfortunately, because of our human frailty and sinfulness, we sometimes turned what is supposed to be a place of worship into a market place. In the account given by Matthew, there were people who exploited religious festivities for personal profits when they set up stalls to sell pigeons and offer money exchange.

We may think that we do not do such things in our churches, although there are churches where recordings of sermons and music; books and other holy hardware are promoted and sold for the benefit of the producers, authors and singers. To be sure, there is a place in our church when we may display and help to raise funds for charity or worthwhile causes to help disadvantaged people. But when the church is misused to promote merchandise for personal benefit, just like what the merchants did in the temple, then such people have changed the temple from *“a house of prayer to a den of robbers.”*

The lesson is not so much whether we have misused a holy place for commercial transaction, though we must avoid doing such a thing. More importantly, we should remember what Paul tells us that our body is the *“temple of the Holy Spirit.”* (1 Cor. 6:19) In as much as we should keep places of worship as holy grounds and not as dens of robbers, it is crucial that we keep ourselves holy and pure. We should not

allow our body, as the *“temple of the Holy Spirit”*, to be corrupted and contaminated by sinful worldly pursuit.

PRAYER

O Lord, our God, forgive us when we have failed to keep ourselves holy and to grow in our Christian faith. We confess that sometimes we have allowed worldly thoughts and desires to tarnish our relationship with you. Keep our life pure and our hearts clean so that in whatever we do or think, we will bring honour to your name. Amen.

SUPPLICATION

- For the regular meals we enjoy daily; the family we belong to; the friends God has given to us; a place we can call home; and easy access to health care, offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God. Take a moment to appreciate all these blessings we receive so freely.
- For advances in medical research which has brought healings to people who suffer serious illnesses, we give thanks to God. And we pray that more affordable and effective treatment will be found and made available to those who are struggling with life-threatening disease.
- For a world still caught in civil unrests and cross-border conflicts, we pray that the political and military leaders will work for peace with justice instead of taking the path of strife and destruction.
- For wholesome family and healthy character formation, we pray that Christian parents will assume greater responsibility to set Godly example for their children to follow instead of letting the world shape their children's life and value. Pray for protection over the hearts and minds of our young ones that they may discern the difference between truth and error. Pray for an inner resolve in each believer that they would resist instant gratification.

*“Create in me a clean heart, O God
And renew a right spirit in me.
Cast me not away from thy presence, O Lord
And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation
And renew a right spirit within me.”*
Keith Green

**If you need any prayer or pastoral care support, kindly
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