

Day 31

Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”? But you have made it a den of robbers.” 11.12-26

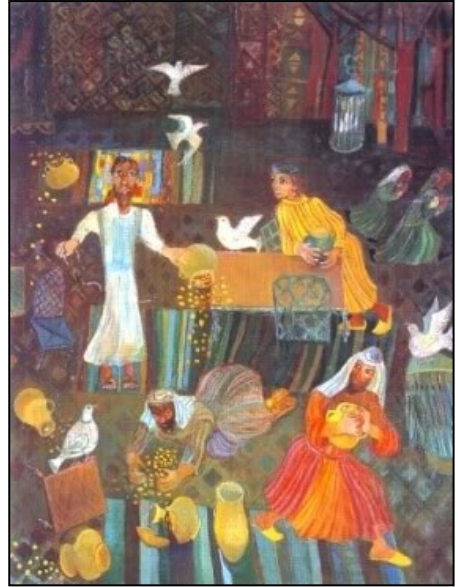
What we do with our own property is, in one sense, our own business. What we do with God’s house, however, is another matter altogether.

We have already seen that there are some things Jesus reacts very strongly against (e.g. 3.1-6, 22-30; 7.1-23; 10.13-16).


What draws a more violent response than any of these, though, is the turning of his house (the temple) into a den of robbers. The quotation is a joining of Isa 56.7 with Jer 7.11, but there are also strong echoes of Malachi’s rebukes and warnings (esp. Mal 3.1-3).

Jesus’ cleansing of the temple is bracketed by his cursing of the fig tree and the lessons he draws from it. The fig tree is a symbol of Israel (see Jer 8.13; Hos 9.10,16). Jesus’ cleansing of false religion from the temple is thus prefigured by his cursing of the fig tree. For all the ritual and sacrifices, the temple cult is fruitless and will be uprooted. More radical still is the statement that follows: Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea... it will be done for him.” “This mountain” is either the Mount of Olives or possibly Mt Zion itself, on which the temple is built; but faith will overpower it (cf. Ps 125.1)! Then follows a brief instruction about faith, prayer and forgiveness, i.e. true religion and the foundations of the new (spiritual) temple which Jesus will build.

The message is clear: false religion, no matter how noble its traditions or historical its claims to authority, will be deposed in favour of the true religion which is founded on faith in God.



? What might please, and what might anger Jesus in our church?

 Father, my greatest desire is to worship you in spirit and in truth. Give me insight, I pray, to discern that which is true worship from that which is false; and courage to reject the latter. In Jesus’ holy name I pray. Amen.