

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

“Get All This Out Of Here!”

Orders from the highest authority, delivered in the highest place of Israel and therefore of the whole earth...and thus a marker for the mapping of our religious universe: it is possible that the Messiah may come in through the front door of *our* sanctuary and tell *us* to shoot the contents. Does this not introduce quite a strange feeling to us?

Desecration

We are used to the image of a desecrated shrine. We are faced with daily stories of it, as we hear of the robbed home, the broken vow, the deceived, the betrayed, the wronged innocents of the world. We look to our faith to be a sacred part of our lives, and we value the sense of truthfulness and honour which belongs to the indwelling of God. We bring to our place of prayer a variety of things: our good gifts, for the blessing of God: our sacrifices, for him to confirm us in generosity or selflessness: our sins, for his forgiveness and our reconciliation. Our sanctuary becomes a *furnished* place as we bring our lives there. The last thing we want there, we feel, is the turning over of our furniture and the order to clear the decks.

Temple Veil

This story of the cleansing always reminds me of the temple veil torn at the death of Jesus. It is torn by no human hand; it represents the desecration of the Jerusalem Temple *by God himself*. This is because the true place of prayer, from that moment onward, is not the great shrine on Mount Zion, with its memories of Solomon and Herod the Great, but the crucified body of Jesus on Mount Calvary. When Jesus talks about the Temple it is often to predict its downfall; I wonder what led him to speak in this way? Was it the knowledge of the malice towards himself

which was being plotted by the priests and scribes within the very walls of the Temple? And is not that very plot a response to his behaviour in cleansing the Temple? It is as if Jesus is destined by God to spell ruin for the religiosity of his own people. His first sermon causes his own village nearly to lynch him: he seems to be on a collision-course with Pharisees, the cultivators of holy perfection, from his first beginnings; he is pursued by scribes, with their law-abiding minds; his death is decreed by priests, and at last called-for by the Sanhedrin, the gathering of Jerusalem standing over and against the Roman Prefect, Pilate.

In Three Days I Will Rebuild It

The desecration Jesus suffers will make room for the building of the Church. Today the universal Church recalls the consecration of the Lateran Basilica, the Cathedral Church of the Saviour and St John, the church of the Vicar of Christ, “the Mother and Head of all churches of the City and the World”. It is in this place that the Bishop of Rome teaches, and celebrates the Eucharist, at the heart of the world, in the centre of the Church. Our “Roman Liturgy” is in communion with his, and thus with all the world’s; it has been from the earliest times the touchstone of Catholic unity, the mark of the universal Church. Today we can usefully recall that the Church is, by her own account, “*semper reformanda*” - always due for reform. Our duty is to stay obedient to the one who turned over the tables in the Temple courts, and so brought down on himself that great desecration, the Cross; as long as we truly enter into that mystery at his altars, and in our real lives, we need not fear that our place of prayer will be utterly destroyed by the blast of his judgment.

Fr Philip