

# Holy Monday



Jesus Curses the Fig Tree  
Church of Saint Andrews, Patras, Greece

## Setting the Stage for Holy Monday

In this essay we will see the events of Holy Monday through the lens of Palm Sunday. In particular, the connection that was made between Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of Ezekiel through His condemnation of the corruption of the Temple and the idolatry and hypocrisy practiced not only by Israel's religious leaders, but also by the people. The reflection of Palm Sunday noted the connection between the Third Temple prophesied by Ezekiel to that of Jesus and the Church. We will read in the scriptures of Holy Monday that Jesus advances these themes through His actions and particularly through His parables and debates with the Jewish religious authorities.

The Bible often uses symbolic language to represent Israel and the Church. Plants and trees are frequently employed symbols, which is not surprising given the agrarian nature of Jewish culture. Jesus uses the Fig Tree as a symbol for Israel on several occasions in the Gospels. He will use this metaphor twice during Holy Week; the first of these occurs on Holy Monday.

Jesus confronts the religious authorities of Israel on Holy Monday, but just who were these individuals and why were they so strongly opposed to Jesus and His message? Let's examine this diverse group so that we can have a better understanding of their motives and why Jesus responded to them the way He did.

The Sadducees were the aristocrats in first century Jewish society. They held important positions of influence in the Sanhedrin Supreme Council frequently including the position of High Priest; Caiaphas was likely a Sadducee. They believed in only the Torah (five books of Moses), and held that the rest of the books of the Jewish Bible (*Tanakh*) were not inspired. They did not believe that the oral tradition of interpretation of the Torah was authoritative. They did not believe in resurrection (life after death), free will, angels or demons, or that a Messiah would come to deliver Israel. They were motivated to preserve their wealth and standing and were willing to work with the Roman authorities in order to maintain the status quo.

The Pharisees came from the "working class" of Jewish society. As a sect they were devoted to the Torah and the Tanakh along with the Mishnah, the oral tradition and teaching of the rabbis. They believed in the resurrection from the dead, free will, angels and demons, and that the Messiah would come to redeem Israel. The theology of the Pharisees is perhaps more in alignment with the teaching of Jesus than any other Jewish sect. They followed strict religious observances including fasting, ritual washing, and tithing. The Pharisees supported some passive resistance efforts against Roman rule.

The Scribes are more properly categorized as a trade than a sect. Their role was to copy the Torah and they compiled the Mishnah. They were experts on both the written and oral traditions and often served as “lawyers” of Jewish Law. Some scribes did belong to sects including the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Herodians shared the belief of the Sadducees that there was no resurrection and no Messiah. They supported the Herodian dynasty, its preservation and advancement through efforts that strengthened the alliance between the Herodians and the Roman governor of Israel. In forming coalitions they were more likely to ally with the Sadducees than the Pharisees.

There were two other sects that are noteworthy in the life of first century Jews of Israel, the Essenes and the Zealots. The Essenes (the “holy ones”) were a monastic sect that lived an ascetic life style in the desert. They rejected the religious authority of Jerusalem, the Temple worship (which they believed to have been corrupted), messianic redemption, and life after death. The Zealots were extremists (or freedom fighters depending on perspective) who led a guerilla type resistance against the Roman occupiers. They believe such resistance was a religious imperative, their motto being, “No rule but the Law, no King but God.” They expected the Messiah would come to their aid. They finally perished by the Roman sword at Masada in 73 AD.

### Jesus Curses the Fig Tree



<sup>18</sup> In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry. <sup>19</sup> And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only. And he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once. <sup>20</sup> When the disciples saw it they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” <sup>21</sup> And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will be done. <sup>22</sup> And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” (Matt 21:18-22)

### The Authority of Jesus Questioned

<sup>23</sup> And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” <sup>24</sup> Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you a question; and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup> The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ <sup>26</sup> But if we say, ‘From men,’ we are afraid of the multitude; for all hold that John was a prophet.” <sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” (Matt 21:23-27)



**The Pharisees Question the Authority of Jesus**  
James Tissot

### The Parable of the Two Sons



<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ <sup>29</sup> And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he repented and went. <sup>30</sup> And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. <sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.” (Matt 21:28-32)

## The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

<sup>33</sup> “Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. <sup>34</sup> When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to get his fruit; <sup>35</sup> and the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. <sup>37</sup> Afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. <sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” <sup>41</sup> They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”



<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:

*‘The very stone which the builders rejected  
has become the head of the corner;  
this was the Lord’s doing,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?*

<sup>43</sup> Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.

<sup>44</sup> And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one, it will crush him.”

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup> But when they tried to arrest him, they feared the multitudes, because they held him to be a prophet. (Matt 21:33-46)

## The Parable of the Wedding Banquet



And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, <sup>2</sup> “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, <sup>3</sup> and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. <sup>4</sup> Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.’ <sup>5</sup> But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup> while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. <sup>8</sup> Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup> Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and

invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.’ <sup>10</sup> And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

<sup>11</sup> “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; <sup>12</sup> and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’

<sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matt 22:1-14)

### The Question about Paying Taxes



<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went and took counsel how to entangle him in his talk. <sup>16</sup> And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men.” <sup>17</sup> Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? <sup>18</sup> But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> Show me the money for the tax.” And they brought him a coin. <sup>20</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” <sup>21</sup> They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” <sup>22</sup> When they heard it, they marveled; and they left him and went away. (Matt 22:15-22)

### The Question about the Resurrection

<sup>23</sup> The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, <sup>24</sup> saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies, having no children, his brother must marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.’ <sup>25</sup> Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. <sup>26</sup> So too the second and third, down to the seventh. <sup>27</sup> After them all, the woman died. <sup>28</sup> In the resurrection, therefore, to which of the seven will she be wife? For they all had her.”

<sup>29</sup> But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. <sup>30</sup> For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. <sup>31</sup> And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, <sup>32</sup> ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” <sup>33</sup> And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. (Matt 22:23-33)

### The Greatest Commandment

<sup>34</sup> But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. <sup>35</sup> And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” (Matt 22:34-40)



### The Question about David’s Son

<sup>41</sup> Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, <sup>42</sup> saying, “What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” <sup>43</sup> He said to them, “How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

<sup>44</sup> ‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
Sit at my right hand,  
till I put thy enemies under thy feet’?

<sup>45</sup> If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?” <sup>46</sup> And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did any one dare to ask him any more questions. (Matt 22:41-46)

## Reflections

### Kevin's Reflections

In the Palm Sunday reflection I made the case that the prophecies of Ezekiel correlated with the events of Palm Sunday, Jesus traveling from the Mount of Olives, through the Eastern Gate of Jerusalem, and His cleansing of the Temple. I further made the case that the prophecy of the Third Temple would be fulfilled later with the Resurrection and Jesus' establishment of His Church. The Church as the Third Temple does not preclude a future construction of a Jewish Third Temple in Jerusalem. I alluded to the shared destiny of the Church and the Jewish people in the Palm Sunday reflection and I will begin to make the case in this reflection that this shared destiny are running in parallel courses and will begin to converge at the "end of the age."

You will perhaps remember from the previous reflection that in chapter eight of Ezekiel the prophet spoke of the corruption of the Temple. It would be these abominations that would bring God's judgment upon the First Temple, Jerusalem, and the Jewish people through the Babylonians. As with many prophecies of the Old Testament there is a layering of fulfillment and we saw that this same prophecy of Ezekiel was fulfilled again with the corruption of the Second Temple and her religious leaders, as condemned by Jesus, and the subsequent destruction of the Temple, Jerusalem, and diaspora of the Jews by the Romans. Will the Third Temple, the Church and Jewish Temple face a similar fate? We will begin to examine this question starting with the scriptures of Holy Monday.

### Jesus Curses the Fig Tree

The Holy Monday scriptures begin with the cursing of the Fig Tree. You'll remember that Jesus and His disciples left Bethany in the morning and were traveling to Jerusalem. They came upon a fig tree and Jesus, being hungry, examined the tree for figs, but it did not have any. This story harkens back to a parable that Jesus had taught earlier which is recorded in Luke chapter thirteen:

<sup>6</sup> And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' <sup>8</sup> And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup> And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9)

Many scripture scholars agree that the owner of the vineyard is God the Father looking for fruit from a barren Israel. Christ, the vinedresser pleads with the owner of the vineyard to spare the tree and that He will take special care of the tree in the hope that within a year's time it will bear fruit. Nevertheless, He will follow the instructions of the owner should the tree remain barren.

This Holy Monday morning the year was up, the tree bore no figs, Jesus cursed the tree, *and the fig tree withered at once*. On Holy Wednesday Jesus will speak of the Fig Tree again and it too will figure into the prophecies of Ezekiel. But for now let's focus on the parables of Holy Monday. The cursing of the fig tree is intimately connected to the Parable of the Wicked Tenants.

### The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

In this story we again see that the owner of the vineyard is looking to harvest his fruit. The owner has tenants managing his vineyard. When the harvest time came the owner sent his servants to his vineyard to collect the fruit, but the tenants beat and killed the servants. The owner, believing that the tenants would honor his son, sent his son to gather the fruit of his vineyard. But the evil tenants killed his son expecting that they would then inherit the vineyard.

The vineyard is Israel and the fruit that God is looking for from Israel is their faithfulness, righteousness, worship, and the recognition of His Son whom He has sent to them. The religious leaders of Israel are the wicked tenants whose job it was to cultivate and care for His house and people. They are not interested in what God wants, but have their desires set upon self-aggrandizement and power. They are unworthy of the authority that God has given them. Jesus proclaims a judgment upon the tenants, the religious leaders, of Israel:

<sup>43</sup> Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.

The Kingdom of God was taken away from Israel and her religious leadership when they rejected the Son, the Christ, and it was given to another nation, the Church, to produce its fruits.

## The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Jesus, being a pedagogue *par excellence*, knew that if you want to get something across you say something, say it again, and then repeat yourself. He does this by repeating His theme for the third time with the parable of the Wedding Banquet. The wedding banquet parable is of particular importance because of the theme of marriage. As I have mentioned several times throughout this Photo-Journal the “marriage” between God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, and His people is a central, perhaps *the* central theme of the Gospel, the New Testament, and even the Old Testament. In this story the king (the Father) is preparing a wedding banquet for his son (Christ). Those who are invited to the wedding banquet are the Children of Israel, but they have made light of it and refuse to accept the invitation as they have refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and their Messiah. As a result God has sent his servants the Apostles and their successors to travel the thoroughfares of the world spreading the Gospel to invite the Gentiles to the wedding of the Bride and the Lamb. We learn, however, that it is not enough just to show up one must be properly attired for the wedding least we be thrown out of the banquet. Our sensibilities may be offended by this seemingly harsh treatment of the poorly dressed guest. We must understand that those attending the wedding banquet, the Church, are not mere guest or onlookers, we are the Bride and we must present ourselves to Him,

*“without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”* (Eph 5:27)

This is not only our responsibility, but also the responsibility of the clergy and other gifts that God has given to the Church:

*<sup>11</sup> And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;* (Eph 4:11-13)

The religious authorities of Israel failed the Jewish people by not preparing them to be the Bride and as a result they all, religious authorities and people alike, ended up paying a terrible price for not recognizing the *time of their visitation*. (Luke 19:44).

The questions we will be asking here and over the next couple of days of Holy Week are these, “Is the Church going to experience the same judgments of Israel in the days ahead? Are the clergy and religious authorities of the Church preparing the Bride so that her wedding garment is “without spot or wrinkle...holy and without blemish?” Will the Third Temple, the Church, repeat the same mistakes as the First and Second Temples of Israel in fulfillment of the multilayered prophecies of Ezekiel the Prophet? Do you think this is impossible because Jesus said that the “gates of hell will not prevail against his Church?” If you think this then Jesus’ own words may change your mind when we get to Holy Wednesday, but for now we are going to examine the crisis of the clergy that Jesus was dealing with in the last week of His public ministry.

### Jesus’ Confrontation with the Religious Authorities

One can readily imagine that the Jewish religious authorities were lying in wait for Jesus’ return after the commotion He had created the day before when He drove the merchants out of the Temple. There were Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and Herodians, not natural allies, but today they were united in their common mission to put an end to this would be messiah. They plotted with one another to challenge Jesus, and to show Him to be a fraud in front of His disciples and those who might yet fall under His spell, and in the process preserve their own status not only with the Jewish people but also with the Roman authorities as well.

You can imagine that they were probably arguing amongst themselves as to their first challenge to Him. “Why don’t we just ask Jesus by what authority does come into the Temple and drives out the merchants, and who gave him that authority?” “Good idea,” they probably agreed. Unfortunately for them, Jesus turned the tables on them by asking them,

*“I also will ask you a question; and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?”*

Jesus “trick” question exposed their duplicitousness. If they said from men then they would lose support from the people because many of them believe the baptism of John was from heaven, but if they said heaven then the people would wonder why they had not supported John. They remained silent, and while they were regrouping Jesus proceeded to excoriate them with parables. When Jesus was done with the parable of the Wedding Banquet a Pharisee and a Herodian attempted a tag-team, two against one against Jesus with a question about taxes—interesting alliance between a Pharisee who would have loathed having to pay taxes to the Romans, and a Herodian who would have supported it. What did they

hope to accomplish with this question? They tried to lay a trap for Jesus just as He had done to them when they had asked from whence came His authority. If Jesus said it was okay to pay taxes to the Romans that would have pleased the Herodians, but would have infuriated the Pharisees and many of the regular Jewish folk listening. If He had so “no” that would have pleased the Pharisees and the people, but could be used against Him in bring a charge of sedition against the Romans. A perfect trap if Jesus says “Yes” He will lose favor with the people, if He says “No” the Roman rulers will throw him in prison and put him on trial for sedition. Except Jesus says,

*“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”*

They didn’t see that coming. Apart from the profound theological and sociological implications of this simple statement Jesus managed to thread the needle keeping favor with both the people and the state; even the Pharisee and the Herodian marveled at His response. Round two goes to Jesus.

Now it was the Sadducees’ turn. Why did they pick a question regarding life after death to challenge Jesus? I suspect they knew that resurrection was central to the teaching of Jesus; after all it was not too many days earlier where Jesus had said to Martha,

*“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. (John 11:25-26)*

And shortly after this Jesus had “supposedly” raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. After this many Jews began to believe in Jesus and it was these events that had brought the Pharisee and the Sadducees together to plot against Jesus and Lazarus (see John 11:45-53; 12:9-11). Resurrection was at the heart of the matter, besides the Sadducees were well versed in debating this topic since it was a main point of contention between them and the Pharisees. It is likely that the arrogant and worldly Sadducees thought that Jesus was little more than an itinerant preacher not skilled in the Torah like they were; this after all was their expertise. The Sadducee who approached Jesus was no doubt confident that he could befuddle Him, showing Jesus to be a fraud in front of the people thereby putting an end to His popularity.

Rather than being intimidated by the Sadducee Jesus employed the Torah, the very foundation of the Sadducee’s confidence, to refute him:

*“And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” (Matt 22:31-32)*

And the people who had watched this interaction between the Sadducee and Jesus were astonished at His teaching. Round three—Jesus.

Hundreds of different religious laws governed the lives of Jews in first century Israel. Debating which laws were applicable under various circumstances was a topic of everyday conversation and debate not just between the religious authorities but also even among the common folk. When resolution was needed an expert on Jewish law would be called in, the Scribe. So, after watching the Sadducee go down in flames when he confronted Jesus on a question related to the resurrection the Pharisees thought that perhaps they might twist Jesus up on a matter of Jewish Law, after all even the best of them could get tangled up in the intricacies of the law. So they called in one of their fellow Pharisees who just happened to be a Scribe, lawyer and an expert on Jewish Law.

When Jesus answered the Scribe’s question regarding the greatest commandment in the Law without hesitation he and all of those listening must have been stunned. Mark provides further insight into Jesus’ encounter with the Scribe that is not recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.

*And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he,<sup>33</sup> and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” (Mark 12:32-33)*

Clearly the Scribe was impressed and said that, probably to the consternation of any Pharisees in earshot of their conversation. This was the only one of the religious authorities who had spoken to Jesus on this day that didn’t slink off in silence, but actually praised Jesus for His response, and Jesus replied accordingly.

*And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any question. (Mark 12:34)*

Wow, I bet the Pharisees and the people who witnessed this exchange were surprised by Jesus' praise. One can't help but wonder what happened to that Scribe. I can imagine the scribe returning to his Pharisee friends and them scowling at him and him shrugging and saying. "What am I supposed to do? He was right." Round four for Jesus and He might have gotten another disciple at the same time.

After four rounds the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and the Scribes had had enough.

*And after that no one dared to ask him any question. (Mark 12:34)*

Unfortunately for the religious authorities that were challenging Jesus, He was not done with them. Jesus proceeded to ask them a question:

*"What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?"*

The Pharisees answered correctly, *"The son of David."* This they knew well since it is expressed numerous times in the Hebrew Bible as in the examples below:

*But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, [David's father] and from his roots a bud shall blossom. <sup>2</sup> The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, (Isaiah 11:1-2)*

*See, days are coming—oracle of the Lord—when I will raise up a righteous branch for David; As king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. <sup>6</sup> In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name to be given him: "The Lord our justice." (Jeremiah 23:5-6)*

<sup>23</sup> *I will appoint one shepherd over them to pasture them, my servant David; he shall pasture them and be their shepherd. (Ezekiel 34:23)*

But Jesus is about to reveal that the Messiah is indeed a descendant of David, but also much more than this; He is the Son of God and the son of man (David). Saint Paul makes this clear in his opening to the Epistle to the Romans:

<sup>1</sup> *Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup> which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy scriptures, <sup>3</sup> the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 1:1-4)*

Jesus continues then by asking His opponents a question about a Psalm written by David:

*"How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,*

*'The Lord said to my Lord,  
Sit at my right hand,  
till I put thy enemies under thy feet'?* (Psalm 110:1)

David is writing this psalm as though he was listening in on a divine conversation between two persons, *"The Lord said to my Lord..."* When we read this in English it is difficult to differentiate between the two "Lords," however when we read from the transliterated Hebrew the passage begins to unfold its mysteries:

If we take a look at the Orthodox Jewish Bible the previous verse from Psalm 110 reads:

*Hashem said unto Adoni [i.e., Moshiach Adoneinu; Malachi 3:1], Sit thou at My right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for thy feet. (Psalm 110:1)*

If you remember from an earlier Photo-Journal Essay (Jesus at Mount Precipice) the name of God was so holy to the Jews that they would not say it aloud, nor would they fully write it so they had other ways of identifying Him, one of these was *Hashem*, which means "the Name." So, the first "Lord" is God Himself, *Hashem*. *Adoni* can be another name for God, but it can also refer to a human person. How do we know when *Adoni* is being used in reference to God or a human lord? Usually, by context, but the majority of times when *Adoni* is used for a human or even an angelic lord the singular form of the word, *adon*, is used; the plural form, *Adoni*, (like a royal "we" used by a king or queen) applies to God.



The writer of Psalm 110, presumably King David, used the term *Adoni* for lord and given what I discussed in the previous paragraph there is general agreement among Bible scholars (mostly Christian scholars that is) that David wrote it this way under the influence of the Holy Spirit so as to convey that this lord is the Lord God. Now the Pharisees believed, as Orthodox Jews do today, that the second “Lord” of Psalm 110 was speaking of the Messiah (Moshiach) whom they believed would be the son, that is, of the line of David. Jesus’ point in discussing this scripture was to reveal the real meaning of verse 1 of Psalm 110, that is, the Messiah is not only the son of David, but is also the Son of God. Thus, when Jesus quoted the scripture He would have made the distinction between *Adoni* and *adon*, and He drives His point home when He asks the Pharisees,

*“If David thus calls him Adoni, how is he his son?”*

If there was a semantic issue between *adoni* and *adon*, the Pharisees would have brought it up, but they did not:

*And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did any one dare to ask him any more questions.*

Of all the controversial issues that Jesus discussed, this claim that the Messiah was the Son of God would have been the most challenging for the religious authorities of Jerusalem. Why? Many of the people were beginning to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, particularly after His triumphant entry into Jerusalem; furthermore Jesus had just answered the question that the religious authorities asked Him when He had arrived at the Temple,

*“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”*

Jesus’ authority ultimately resides in *Hashem* [God] who is His Father.

\* \* \*

If you look again at the verse from the Orthodox Jewish Bible there is a note in brackets that includes the Hebrew word *Moshiach Adoneinu*, which translates as Messiah Lord. They also give us another biblical reference, that is, Malachi 3:1. Now this is what I love about Scripture, you find a little fleck of gold, but often if you’re willing to do a little digging this fleck of gold turns into a Mother Load. Let’s see where Malachi 3:1 leads us. We’ll begin with the Revised Standard Version which is what I usually use.

*Now I am sending my messenger—he will prepare the way before me; And the lord whom you seek will come suddenly to his temple; The messenger of the covenant whom you desire—see, he is coming! says the LORD of hosts. (Mal 3:1)*

*I will send malachi [Hebrew: messenger], and he shall prepare the Derech [Hebrew: way] before me: and HaAdon (the L-rd [Moshiach]), whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His Heikhal,[Hebrew: Temple] even the Malach HaBrit [Hebrew: messenger of the covenant], in whom ye have chafetz [Hebrew: delight]: hinei [Hebrew: see], He is coming, saith Hashem Tzva’os. [Hebrew: the Name of host] (Malachi 3:1)*

It is fascinating to me that the Orthodox Jewish Bible link Psalm 110:1 to Malachi 3:1 for the following reasons:

- (1) Orthodox Jews recognize that it is the Messiah that links these two verses.
- (2) Both Scriptures refer to the Messiah as Lord. The Psalm uses the Hebrew, *Adoni*, for Lord whereas Malachi uses *Adon*, for Lord. Is this a contradiction? It would be except for the Person of Christ who is, by virtue of the Incarnation, both the Son of God and the son of man.
- (3) Malachi speaks of the messenger [malachi] who will prepare the way for the *HaAdon*, the Lord Messiah. The Jews were expecting that the prophet Elijah would return to prepare the way for the Lord Messiah.

*Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.<sup>6</sup> He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse. (Mal 4:5)*

Jesus told His disciples that John the Baptist was Elijah.

<sup>13</sup> For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; <sup>14</sup> and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup> Let anyone with ears listen! (Matt 11:13-15)

Elijah/John the Baptist was there to prepare the Jesus in His first coming. Will he return when Christ returns? The disciples asked Jesus this same question:

<sup>10</sup> And the disciples asked him, "Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" <sup>11</sup> He replied, "Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; <sup>12</sup> but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands." (Matt 17:10-12)

"Elijah has already come" and the Jews did not recognize who John the Baptist was and the king, Herod, had him executed. But Jesus, in the verse prior to this, makes it clear that Elijah will come again: "Elijah is indeed coming." Remember, that when Jesus said this John the Baptist was already dead. So, it could right fully said that there will be a total of three "comings" of Elijah: (1) as Elijah the Tishbite, (2) as Elijah, that is, John the Baptist, and (3) as Elijah the "?" who comes on the "great and terrible day of the Lord," that is Christ's Second Coming.

(4) The verse from Malachi also states that the *HaAdon*, Messiah, will "suddenly come to His Temple."

<sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

*"For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; <sup>3</sup> he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. (Mal 3:2-4)*

This happened on Palm Sunday which was the preface to the confrontation between Jesus and the religious authorities on Holy Monday. This confrontation will only heighten in the days ahead.

\* \* \*

### *Ad Orientem*

## **Part II: The Perils of Disorientation**

In part one of this reflection we ended with a question, "Do you really believe that our orientation makes that big a difference?"

You bet it does.

On just the natural level consider what a 1° disorientation would mean for an airplane traveling from San Francisco to Washington, DC. In the amount of time that it would normally make that flight the plane would end up in Baltimore, Maryland and not in Washington DC. If you want to get to your destination you have to have the correct orientation, and then you have to stay on course for the duration of your travel. In an analogous way, even the smallest disorientation in theology over a long enough period of time can lead to apostasy not only for an individual, but even for the Church. It was for this reason that the Church fought so hard to preserve orthodoxy throughout the centuries; keeping the ship of the Church on course requires constant diligence, particularly by its officers, the clergy, as Satan and his minions are constantly warring against the Church by subtly disguising his lies to make them appear to be God's truth. It has been this way from the beginning.

*Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; <sup>3</sup> but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. (Gen 3:1-6)*

It was Satan who was the first to "disorient" humanity from facing her Creator by casting doubt when he asked, "Did God say?" Once Satan had Eve's attention, her orientation was turned towards him, and he could now plant his deception in

her mind, “*You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” Mixed with Satan’s lies was one very important truth that must have resonated deeply with Eve; that truth was, “and you will be like God.” Becoming *like God* is the *telos*, the fulfillment of our destiny in the Church. This is our destiny as the Bride who will for eternity live in perfect unity with Jesus, the Bridegroom, and with the Trinity. It is important that we know our destination because Satan also has a destination and he would dearly love to get as many people on board, but it’s destination is not heaven with God, but hell with him. So let’s examine this theology of becoming *like God*, because in doing so it should inspire us to stay oriented towards the Lord because what He has planned for His Bride, the Church, is inconceivably glorious.

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him,”* (1Cor 2:9)

The Greeks have a word for becoming *like God*; it is *Theosis*. You might not have heard of this word, but its doctrine is clearly to be found in the Scriptures:

<sup>3</sup> *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,* <sup>4</sup> *by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.* (2Peter 1:3-4)

*Theosis* can be rightly defined as, “we become what we face.”

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* (2Cor 3:18)

<sup>2</sup> *Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* <sup>3</sup> *And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.* (1John 3:2-3)

We become *like God* by becoming “conformed to the image of the Son” (Rom 8:29), and this is done by keeping ourselves oriented towards Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith:

<sup>2</sup> *while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God.* (Heb 12:2)

This *theosis* of the believer is both personal and communal. It is personal in our daily assent to God’s grace, “Let it be done unto me according to Thy Word,” and our repentance when we say no. It is personal when we pick up our cross daily to follow Him, to trust Him in the wilderness of life, and when we rely on His strength and to not despair in the face of our own weakness. It is personal when we diligently and rightly handle the Word of Truth so as to present ourselves to God as one approved (2Tim 2:15). Yet, in all these things we know this cannot be done apart from His Church for God has given gifts to the Church, her shepherds and sacraments, so that we may grow up into all aspects of Him (Eph 4:9-16). Nor can we maintain our orientation towards Christ without the Church Triumphant who has run the race before us...

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Heb 12:1-2)

...and thus we ask for their intercession knowing that the effectual and fervent prayer of the righteous avails much (James 5:16). And we are confident that we will be united with them, into one Body, who is the Bride and it is in this Bride who reflects the glory of her Bridegroom that we will have communion with Christ and the Trinity. This is the full expression of our hearts’ restlessness that Saint Augustine spoke of when he wrote, “*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*” Satan knows this homing beacon that God placed within the *imago dei* (image of God) of all of us, and he has hacked it with a similar signal to disorient us, and to draw us to himself. This false signal in many ways has the look and feel of *theosis*, but it is not founded in “Be it done unto me according to Thy Word,” but rather, “Be it done to me according to My Word.” This is the motto of the age in which we live, “Do what thou wilt,” and it is nothing more or less than following Satan in his rebellion against God.

Modern man has come to believe that he “is the measure of all things.” This is not new, of course, having been first postulated by the Greek Philosopher, Protagoras (481 BC). It is the *Thelemic* [Latin: governed by will] man who defines for him self what is true, and good, and beautiful. Modern man experiences a perverted *theosis* as he does and becomes what *he wills* especially when it is in contravention to the will of God. He has traded his *imago dei* as if he were a modern day Esau for a temporal image that he and society declares, “It is Good.” He and his community of like-minded Modernists conspire together not only to recreate themselves, but also society and its institutions into their image and so that one day all will burn incense on the altar of this new god. And how has their captain, Satan, led them from victory to victory? Words, for words have the power to create and to destroy.

<sup>3</sup> *By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.* (Heb 11:3)

*Hast God said?* (Gen 3:1)

We are indeed living in a time which could be described as, “The War of the Words.” It is the battle Jesus fought in the wilderness with Satan. The devil quoted a scripture, and Jesus refuted him with a scripture. Back and forth it went until the devil, finding nothing in Him (John 14:30), left Christ for a time. Satan is back with all his fury and he is again having a war of words, but this time with the Body of Christ, the Church.

Hast God said, “*male and created He made them?*” (Gen:1:26)

Hast God said “*for this reason a man will leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife?*” (Gen 2:24 & Matt 19:5)

Hast God said, “*I knit you in your mother’s womb?*” (Ps 135:13)

Hast God said, “*No man comes to the Father except through me?*” (John 14:6)

Hast God said, “*For the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.*” (Matt 7:134)

Hast God said, “*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*” (John 6:53)

Hast God said, “*I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*” (Matt 10:34)

Hast God said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.*” (Matt 28:19)

If you follow the news you know that many Christian churches are offering confusing and sometimes heterodox responses to the challenges of the secular world’s “Hast God said?” on such topics as gender, marriage, abortion, salvation in Christ alone, the existence of hell and the broad way leading to it, the legitimacy of evangelization, and the list could go on and on. The Church knows what the Scripture says, yet many church leaders back peddle rather than offer an orthodox response. Why is this? It could be for any of a number of reasons: perhaps ignorance, may be they fear the intimidation and hostility they’ll receive if they offend a particular community, they may prefer the honor of their secular peers over the honor that comes from God, but I think it is mostly because they have lost their supernatural faith and prefer to believe the philosophical constructs of Modernism over the truths of Scripture and Tradition. And unfortunately, as the shepherds go, so go the sheep.

How did we get here? In a word, “disorientation.” We stopped facing East, and taking our eyes off Jesus we turned around and looked at one another and fell into the idolatry of Modernity. Called to be a people set apart for God’s own possession the Church reoriented itself away from God and towards the World of Men. She sought natural solutions and associations in place of the supernatural gifts that feed the heart’s restlessness for God; She lost sight of her *telos*, becoming the Bride of Christ, and instead fixed her gaze on the actualization of the individual through the community of humankind. Truth was replaced by feelings, virtue by values clarification, and beauty—well, that became something in the eye of the beholder. No wonder the sheep are lost when they have been fed a steady diet of juvenile philosophy and theology. Shepherds have fed their flocks milk and as a result they are ill prepared for the days ahead.

<sup>11</sup> *About this we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.* <sup>12</sup> *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God’s word. You need milk, not solid food;* <sup>13</sup> *for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child.* <sup>14</sup> *But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.* (Heb 5:11-14)



Our shepherds have to get their act together for the sake of the sheep that may “perish for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). This can only be done when they turn *away* from the sheep, and face *ad Orientem*, and in facing Christ the Holy Spirit will give them what they need for their churches, the fullness of the Truth Who is Christ.