

**Temple Rituals vs. Spirit of Worship** Twenty-second Week in Ordinary Time Friday,  
November 20, 2015 7:30 PM **1Mc 4:36-37, 52-59; Lk 19:45-48** Healing Mass  
(It all gets back to the spirit and the need we have for the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of holiness. And this is something God wants us to live in.)

There is an interesting parallel between the first and the second readings. This first reading is from **the Book of Maccabees, and it's about persecution**, a period of great travail in the history of God's people, external persecution, the force of government trying to stop the Jews from worshipping in their Temple according to their tradition that had been handed on since Moses. **And many died at the hands of the government**, the king called Antiochus Epiphanes.

Now in this second reading, in the Gospel according to Luke, we have again the **Temple** at the center of the issue, but it isn't any longer a question of external force trying to stop the people from worshipping according to the laws laid down by Moses. All that is going along quite swimmingly, but inwardly there is a terrible problem that Jesus senses. **There is a spiritual vacuum**. Somehow all of this activity isn't doing what it's supposed to do; there's something missing. When he talks to the woman at the well, he talks about worship in Spirit and truth. He is not finding that in the Temple because it isn't something that can be provided by outward appearances; it's something else. Evidently at the time of the Maccabean revolt when the Temple was rededicated, there was great rejoicing and great devotion and great enthusiasm for God. Apparently, at the time of Jesus, no, this had vanished. **Externally things were better than ever as far as the Temple went**, more beautiful, more elegant, bigger, more extensive, more remarkable, **but the Spirit wasn't there**.

So Jesus does something rather shocking. **He throws out of the Temple all of the animals that were needed for the sacrifices, and he says, "My house shall be a house of prayer"**—that of course is a quotation. Well, isn't sacrifice prayer? Not necessarily. It was very prayerful at the time of the Maccabees, but now, no. Now outwardly everything is just hunky-dory, but inwardly, no; something's missing. And Jesus senses that, and he is filled with a sort of zeal you could almost say is fanatic—but not really; he didn't hurt anyone—a zeal for worship in Spirit and truth, a desire to render to the Father all that the Father deserves, and the Father deserves everything because everything comes from God. Jesus, who is the Word of God enfleshed, is **filled with the very human desire that God created human nature for, to be in total communion with God**, to live in total communion with God, and thereby he is desirous of completely letting go of everything other than God, a total surrender to God, a total sacrifice to God, something that is different in kind from the sacrifices of Temple worship because it goes to the very heart of what we are as human beings, and it offers to God the very core of who we are.

**In this, Jesus, of course, although in a way beginning it here, doesn't really bring it to culmination until Calvary**. That's what the Cross is all about. **It's about Jesus being stripped of everything so that he can give everything to the Father**. And in this, **he is leading us into a new way of living**, a way that is no longer empty or made up of formal ritual, but rather a life that is full of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that filled the hearts of the disciples and the apostles after Jesus' resurrection, that led them forth in their own way to witness to Jesus and to the truth, the truth that made them free, the truth that is the way and the life, who is Christ. And this of course is **the very reason for the Church to exist: to share that great reality, that freeing reality**,

**that freeing truth with the whole world.**

Now people were taken aback here and the chief priests and scribes and the leaders of the people actually wanted to put Jesus to death. They were upset because **he was telling them that their way of worshiping God wasn't really right, and that can upset a lot of people.** It can upset a lot of people to be told that they are not really following God's word. **But God's word is not some sort of external thing; it's an internal thing.** The word is the meaning. The Word is Christ. **And we only can live the Word through the Holy Spirit.** And if we think we need something else, if we look for something else, we are not really quite aware of what Jesus was talking about. There is nothing else.

“My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.” A den of thieves—den: hiding place; thieves—I don't know how they were thieves, but this of course is a quotation from an earlier prophet. I think the key word is den—**den is a hiding place.** And to the Pharisees Jesus complained about hypocrisy. A hypocrite is an actor. Both are somehow false. An actor isn't necessarily false as an actor, but an actor is not really the character he or she is portraying. **So there's all kinds of falsity possible if we take our roles to be who we are.** And that seems to be what Jesus was implying. The Pharisee party, the party of the synagogue, the leaders of the synagogue, the teachers, devoted to the Law, yes, but apparently not to the spirit of the Law. Here, in regard to the Temple, a similar problem. Yes, **the chief priests were devoted to the Temple and to the rituals of the Temple, but apparently not the spirit of worship.**

**So it all gets back to the spirit and the need we have for the spirit of truth, the spirit of life, the spirit of holiness. And this is something God wants us to live in.** He does not want to give to us as someone gives something, but he wants to bestow it and pour it into our lives, as Jesus himself poured out his life, so that we could be full.

So these two sides of the Temple vie with us today, and **we have to be able to see clearly where we are.** What are we doing? **Are we really responding to what the Father desires, worship in Spirit and truth,** or do we think that the gospel and the faith is really about us and what we want and what we think we need? That's the question Luke leaves us with.