

# BIBLICAL PAGES

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## Jesus' places and relations

### Lectio n° 7 Two in one

Building relationships is like building a temple, the Temple of God that we are (2 Co 6:16) for us to grow, to grow in harmony with each other: it is a way of loving, if we enrich others and welcome their beauty. Yet, this is not always the case. Sometimes we do not build the common building, we do not share our own 'bricks'. Sometimes we try to demolish instead of building, by harshly criticizing others.

Jesus' meeting with the Pharisees and Sadducees in the Temple is emblematic.

The Temple is the place where God can be encountered, God can be worshipped. But it is also the place where Israel is established as a 'corporal body'.

On the contrary, in the text we will be dealing with we will see that the reception of the Torah is fragmented. Which element can create unity? What can create a 'body', what can make men grow in an unshakeable relationship with God as well as with our brothers and sisters? In short, which is the greatest commandment of all?

Let us listen to Jesus, the Cornerstone in which "the whole building grows together into a holy Temple in the Lord" (Ep 2:21).

#### Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

*Come Holy Spirit, Consoler,  
fill our lives with Your light  
so that we may be witnesses of Christ, crucified and risen.  
Come in our midst,  
and remind us of the words of Jesus.  
Come in our midst,  
and inspire us with the thoughts of Jesus.  
Come Holy Spirit, Consoler,  
teach us, pilgrims in the world, some prophetic gestures and authentic words.  
Teach us prayer and action, and never one without the other.  
Come Holy Spirit, Consoler,  
grant us to be servants of God and servants of our neighbour,  
and never servants of One without the other.  
Inflame our hearts and our minds with the sweetness of charity  
and destroy separation and division in us.  
Come Holy Spirit, Consoler,  
come today and always into our existence,  
make our sterile womb fruitful by Your life force,  
so that we may generate the Word of God  
and give it once again to the world.  
Amen.*

# 1. Lectio

(to read the Word / to listen to it)

## Matthew 21:23a; 22:34-40

*23 He had gone into the Temple... 34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees they got together 35 and, to put Him to the test, one of them put a further question, 36 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' 37 Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and the first commandment. 39 The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. 40 On those two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'*

Let us approach the text.

In the Temple, Jesus disputes with the different categories of people that subscribe to different theologies and religious practices in Israel.

This chapter, Chapter 22, shows the third of the five disputes of Jesus'. The premise is the parable told to the chief priests and the elders (21:23), to whom He announces that the Kingdom will be taken away from them and given to those who make it bear fruit. Then the first two discussions are held respectively with the Pharisees and Herodians, who wanted to make Him stumble on the "tribute to Caesar"; and with the Sadducees, who provoked Him on the issue of the resurrection. Our text is focussed on the encounter with a Doctor of the Law, a Pharisee, who wants to put Jesus to the test.

Let us divide the text into its parts:

- 23 In the Temple
- 34-36 Put to the test
- 37-38 The greatest commandment
- 39 Similar
- 40 Two in one

### In the Temple

*23 He had gone into the Temple...*

After the announcements of the passion, Jesus enters Jerusalem preceded by the procession of the disciples. He is the Messianic King with His messianic community, acclaimed by the crowd who wonders who He might be. His entrance into the Temple is also of a Messianic type (21:12). Through it, He reveals Himself as "One who is greater than the Temple" (12:6).

The gesture of expelling the merchants from the Temple is also Messianic: He claims the Temple for Himself as a "House of Prayer" (Is 56:7); to the Messiah, right in the Temple, come the blind and the lame whom He heals (21:14); and the children greet Him as the Son of David. But if the acclamations come from the mouths of children and babies (cf Ps 8:3), in our text the opposition to the meek King, coming to judge the Temple, the City and its people by His very presence and His ethos, comes from the Temple's elite.

In fact, when Jesus returns to the Temple once again in 22:23 and the third disputes begins (third, out of the five related before Jesus' arrest), the Pharisees are the protagonists: they "got together"... From a literal point of view, here the evangelist says that they "gather among themselves", there is a "conspiracy". St Matthew stresses the hostility of the Pharisees towards Jesus. He is speaking to a community that suffers from the opposition between the Pharisees and Judeo-Christians and conflictual relations after 70 AD.

Disputes between exponents of different theological schools were normal in the Temple. There were open discussions, searching for truth, trying to deepen the knowledge of God's commandments and the interpretation of the Law.

This time, however, St Matthew emphasizes that this dispute is different from the regular ones, such as the one related by St Luke in 2:46-47, when Jesus went to Jerusalem and remained in the Temple with the doctors of the Law.

### Put to the test

*34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees they got together 35 and, to put Him to the test, one of them put a further question, 36 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?'*

Now, after hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees in the dispute over the resurrection, a doctor of the Law, an expert, has the task of putting Jesus to the test by questioning Him with the evil intent of making Him stumble. The verb used by St Matthew is the same used to refer to Satan putting Jesus to the test in the desert (Mt 4:1).

Which is the greatest commandment of the Law?

Of course, given that the Law had to be put into practice by following 613 precepts, a countless number, the question meant, "Which of these precepts should be given pride of place?" "How can one be sure of doing the most important thing of all?"

Let us consider the Sermon on the Mount and listen to Jesus stating that He has not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfil them... (Mt 5:17) Much has been discussed about the verb 'to fulfil': this does not simply mean 'to confirm', or 'to complete', but 'to give it and show its deepest meaning, ie, God's will contained in the words of the Torah'. This is the reason why later on He will say that whoever puts into practice and teaches even the least of the commandments is great in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the least of them is contained the whole Law and the meaning of the whole Law: a single meaning with many facets (cf James 2:10).

Therefore, being put to the test on the greatest commandment of all meant either standing for legalism (the justice of the Scribes and Pharisees, 5:20) or fighting their mentality and introducing a new understanding (the Sermon on the Mount's one), the perspective that Jesus Himself came to reveal.

### The greatest commandment

*37 Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and the first commandment.'*

Jesus does not introduce His answer by saying, "I think...", "In my opinion..." His answer is not self-referential. It shows that Jesus is fully aware that He has come to fulfil, to provide a deeper meaning to the Law and the Prophets, according to God's very own mind.

A verb captures our attention: "You must love" / "You shall love". The greatest commandment Jesus is pointing to is taken from Dt 6:4-8, that is, from the prayer that the Israelites recite at least twice a day. This commandment implies a love for the Lord, for one's own God, with the whole heart, with the whole soul, with the whole mind. But it is a commandment for the 'future', a commandment in which one has to grow, a commandment one has to obey by growing in love. It is not a commandment that is fulfilled by a single act, you do the relevant thing and that's it. It is fulfilled in the future, because surrendering oneself to God is the work of one's whole life. In the future, because this commandment contains also a promise. In the future, because it implies an actual tension between different dimensions of the self, within a relationship with God that it is not limited to the Temple, to worship, to a detail, to precepts of exasperated fussiness. One must learn to love God not only in a holy place, but in his own flesh, by being more and more involved with Him.

Can love be subdivided into little pieces? Can one say Yes now, and No immediately afterwards? Love implies totality, from its very start: "Listen, Israel..." Even when he is listening, one has to be open to God, in order to welcome Him. This is the greatest commandment of all, the first one ('proton'), not in the sense

that it comes first in a list, but in the sense that it is the basis of everything in order to live life to the full. The more the Other enters us and we make room for Him, the more we will be able to love.

This is the meaning of a commandment in the future, implying totality, because it is related to our own ability to love, to our own ability to do something in a specific moment.

And apart from being a love to be fulfilled in the future, it is a humble love: we must give away the whole of our selves, in each and every situation, and still keeping an attitude of continuous openness and availability.

We will have a great hope, thanks to the continuous down-pouring of God's love onto us, and thanks to the awareness that the love we can have for Him is that same love that we have received by Him, and that pervades our heart, soul and mind. That love can change us. We will never feel that "we have reached the finish line", but still we will experience wholeness in our everyday lives.

### Similar

*39 The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself.*

Why is the second commandment like the first? Because you shall love your neighbour as yourself is like "You shall love the Lord your God" (Lv 19:18). Once again a future, once again a promise, once again a growth. There is a tension to see the all-encompassing presence of God in ourselves as well as in others. To love God in ourselves, as beings whose vital forces must be focussed on the Other, the loving and beloved God. We can be given a future of being reconciled with ourselves, if we start from the founding relationship with God who loved us first.

A further step is that all our vital dimensions (heart, soul, mind) expand to include all the others. God in ourselves, God in others, others in ourselves.

Jesus does not speak of philanthropic love, of good coexistence... We have already highlighted that it is as if there were only one meaning and many facets: the main meaning, the 'proton', is reflected, reverberates also in the second commandment. So, loving ourselves is a consequence of loving God in ourselves; loving others is a consequence of loving God not only in others, but also of not being able to separate ourselves from others in any way. "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets" (7:12).

### Two in one

*40 On those two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'*

The whole Law and the Prophets depend on these two precepts, on a triangle that has God as its vertex, and our relationship between us and others as its base.

In the Temple Jesus surpasses the fragmentation of the Law: He teaches us to fulfil in ourselves the interior unity informed by a unique and irrevocable sense: love, as an opening to the love of God who loves Himself in us and loves others through us, by mysteriously but actually recognizing that same identical love, that same similar image we all have in our hearts.

Jesus is not speaking in a theoretical way. He is not someone who speaks and then does nothing, as the Pharisees accused in Mt 23:3. What looks like a 'future', like something fulfilled just for a moment, but that is calling us to constantly grow in wholeness like men or women, has already been fulfilled in Jesus. Where? When? On the Cross: there the utmost love for the Father and the utmost love for the brothers and sisters is shown. The Cross is the place and the moment where and when the two commandments, the two similar commandments, have become "two in one", indeed "two in One". All flesh is summed up in Jesus, and on the Cross His love for the Father, His faithfulness to His salvific Love is equal to "loving others as ourselves". On the Cross we find that love for God and love for men coincide. Love for God and love for men coincide in one single act, Jesus' last act fulfilling each and every other act, revealing the full stature of Christ.

To love God means to love others. Jesus has come to fulfil the Law and the Prophets and that has a historical consistency, experienced in the flesh. The crucified Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets.

## **2. Meditatio** **(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)**

In the Temple Jesus shows us the way to surpass fragmentation, dispersion, as well as ranking the commandments according to an order of importance.

Jesus, the New Temple (Jn 2:21), something greater than the Temple (Mt 7:12), invites us to look at His own life, His own way of loving, as a goal we must strive for. Is it too difficult?

We must acknowledge that we can never say that “we have already arrived”. We must be humble and ready to let our ability to love grow, and also be always open to receive more and more love from God, and more opportunities to love.

Jesus said to Angela of Foligno: “Become capable, and I will become a torrent”. We are striving to reach the full stature of Christ (Ep 4:13), as the whole Christ, Head and members, Man in a collective sense.

I suggest you read the following text, showing us a different way of understanding the relationship between us and others in order for us to get a wider awareness of the Self, helping us in our concrete relationships as well as in prayer.

*“You shall love your neighbour as yourself...” But what is this ‘I’, this ‘myself’? I have been granted to grasp the meaning of this concept through the image of a colossal world tree. I am nothing but a small leaf on a branch of that tree, but the tree is my base, not a reality alien to me.*

*So, if I pray for the whole world, I pray for this whole tree with thousands of leaves, a tree in which I am also a very small leaf...*

*I think you have understood my example: I cannot separate myself from humanity, beginning with Adam... We are all creatures of God, we belong to this tree that is called ‘man’, the human being.*

*If I carry within me the God who created the world and the entire tree – the human being – what is the meaning of the word ‘I’? What do you have in your consciousness when you say ‘I’?*

*In the image of Christ, we must become ‘bearers’ of the whole mankind, and even ‘bearers’ of God: then we shall understand that this ‘I’ is the image of the Absolute, of course in microscopic dimensions, but still a real image... Christ carries within Himself the whole mankind without excluding anyone, not even a single ‘leaf’.*

*(taken from Archimandrite Sophronius, ‘Building the Temple of God in Us and in Our Brothers’, Vol I, pp. 140-141)*

## **3. Oratio** **(to pray the Word / to repeat it)**

*Lord God, how do I wish to see You!*

*But I don’t want to love the unpleasant and ambitious colleague,  
the petulant and possessive friend,  
the noisy neighbour.*

*I would like to see You,  
but I don’t like window cleaners and poor people,*

*I can’t stand gypsies,  
and I’m angry with immigrants who come to steal our jobs.*

*I would like to see You,  
but I can’t stand the parish priest because he is the kind of man who does all by himself,  
I can’t stand the bishop who is unable to decide,*

*I can't stand the Pope who is travelling too much.  
Lord God, I love You.  
You are neither intrusive nor possessive;  
neither petulant nor noisy;  
neither arrogant nor annoying.  
You are perfect. You don't bother me at all.  
Lord God, indeed, in order to see You  
I have to love even annoying people.  
Why don't You show Yourself in the dawn and the dusk,  
in the seas and in mountaintops,  
or at least in the faces of beautiful and the nice?  
No. I can see You only by loving even the boring people.  
Lord God, how strange You are!  
(Fr Tonino Lasconi)*

#### **4. Contemplatio** **(to contemplate the Word / silence)**

Let us keep our gaze fixed on the glorious Crucifix, let us contemplate Him and plunge into that silent and powerful Love, uniting two loves in One, the true Temple that we must worship.

#### **5. Collatio** **(to share the Word)**

Let us share that little ray of light that has come to us from the Word, pointing to that calling to love with the whole of ourselves.