

The Rev. Dr. Steven Tuell, James A. Kelso Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Scripture

Matthew 21:12-22

¹² Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers."

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry ¹⁶ and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'" ¹⁷ He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

¹⁸ In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹ And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. ²⁰ When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" ²¹ Jesus answered them, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. ²² Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive."

Devotional

In today's gospel, Jesus twice quotes from Scripture. While driving from the temple those who buy and sell, Jesus says, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer' [Isa 56:7]; but you are making it a den of robbers [Jer 7:11]" (Mt 21:13). In contrast to those who would restrict worship to those able to pay, Jesus welcomes all comers, healing the sick and even accepting the happy songs of children. When criticized, he again quotes from Scripture: "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'" (Mtt21:16; cf. Ps 8:2). The first quote places Jesus among the prophets; the second affirms him as God! In this Advent season, may we prepare for the coming of Christ's kingdom through *true* worship, joining our praises to the songs of children and of outcasts.

Prayer

Holy Lord, may your Spirit set our hearts ablaze with your prophetic zeal for justice. When we are tempted to act as gatekeepers and brokers, remind us that your presence is not a commodity that we control, but a power that transforms our lives and our world. *Maranatha*—Come Lord Jesus! Amen.