

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, C – November 16, 2025 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 7:15, 8:30, and 11:00am Sunday Masses – 800 words

The last iteration of the great Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was not completed until AD66. And even more than 30 years before that, when Jesus was preaching his sermon found in today's gospel passage, it was already a splendid thing to behold: recall the beginning of the passage, where he said that "some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings" – it was clearly a marvel to behold and a source of national pride, yes, even a few decades before it was considered completed.

The Jews understood the temple as basically the center of the Universe. It was seen as fulfillment of the Garden of Eden – and built on the very spot where Abraham had endeavored to sacrifice Isaac. The historian Josephus, writing during the generation just after the Ascension, spoke eloquently about how it was a microcosm: the temple was a representation in miniature, as it were, of the entirety of Creation. Although by the time of Christ it had already been destroyed and rebuilt once, its permanent destruction was unthinkable.

But the dramatic and permanent destruction of the temple, preceded by calamitous persecutions and even signs in the cosmos, was precisely what Jesus predicted – and precisely what came to pass. We see the terrible persecutions that led up to AD70 narrated, for example, in the Acts of the Apostles. And again, the author Josephus recorded the historical fact of the destruction of the temple by the Romans in his manuscript known as *The Jewish Wars*, including the fact of fearful cosmological signs that preceded it.

When you go to Jerusalem today, there is the so-called Wailing Wall or Western Wall where Jews still go to pray and the rest of us certainly go to pay homage. But the Wailing Wall was basically a retaining wall upon which the temple was surmounted. Now, the so-called "Dome of the Rock", a Muslim shrine, stands there. Christ said that not a stone would be left upon another; that the entire thing would come down. And that's what truly happened – just four years after its building and adornment was finalized.

But this gospel passage has an eschatological dimension, too: Christ refers to "the end". And although before the destruction of the temple in AD70 there were indeed persecutions, wars, insurrections, etc., yet these phenomena have repeated ever since, too. Yes, last week we had occasion to consider how the Jewish Temple was fulfilled in Christ. It had been the center of the fitting worship of the true God, but through his incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection, right worship of God was now forever affiliated with him.

With him, indeed – and with those united with him by grace. Baptism has made of each one of us a "temple in the temple", a member of Christ, a locus or source or "center" of true worship... and thus also a target of the powers of death and destruction that have sought to prevail since the dawn of time, but over which Jesus Christ has already been victorious by virtue of his passion, death, and resurrection. Therefore, "not a hair on your head will be destroyed", he says. "By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

In other words, the resurrection and victory awaits us, too. We may well suffer, and we most certainly will die, and in that sense, "not a stone upon another stone" will remain: our bodies will decay and decompose and return to the dust of the earth. But the powers of death can never destroy the soul of one who is united with Jesus Christ, the true and final temple; our souls will enter into the divine worship of heaven, and by the power of his resurrection, our bodies will follow. We will be re-built in a way that is everlasting.

We must therefore ask him for the grace of this perseverance of which he speaks. In our Catholic tradition, we call it "final perseverance". Here, one of the private prayers of the priest before receiving Holy Communion is instructive: bowing at the altar, he prays:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God,  
who, by the will of the Father  
and the work of the Holy Spirit,  
through your Death gave life to the world,  
free me by this, your most holy Body and Blood,  
from all my sins and from every evil;  
keep me always faithful to your commandments,  
and never let me be parted from you.

We should thank him often for our Catholic faith; for associating us with himself through the sacraments, beginning with Holy Baptism – and by them, also sustaining us in his life. May he grant us to persevere through every trial and tribulation until we are securely cemented as living stones of the eternal temple of heaven.