

'DEVASTATED YET UPLIFTED TO GOD' – HOMILY – 13 NOVEMBER 2016

We can reflect about our difficulties in life, past, present and future possible challenges.
What about destruction and devastation?

Have we ever been as **DESOLATED** as the context of today's Gospel text?

Let us spend some time first appreciating the Second Temple in Jewish history, for Jesus and for the early Christian disciples.

THE TEMPLE HISTORY - SETTING THE SCENE

Let us set the scene in Jerusalem.

The First Temple was destroyed in 587 BC. We know it as Solomon's Temple.

The people are scattered and exiled. We know this as The Babylonian Exile of 587-539 BC.

After much prayer, some of the Exiled were allowed to return home in 539 BC.

They built a new, smaller Second Temple in Jerusalem.

The Temple once more was the centre of their **FAITH, IDENTITY, UNITY**, and **CULTURE**.

They gave glory to God.

Then in the next century, around 458-445 BC, more Exiles returned.

This became a time of religious and social reform.

In the time between the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus, Herod had expanded the precinct of the Temple dramatically.

By the time Jesus is ministering as an adult, the Second Jerusalem Temple is impressive.

And the work continues on it over the next few years.

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles - with the same author relating part one and part two - tells about episodes in the temple.

Jesus was taken as a baby to the Temple for the customary purification. Luke 2: 22f

The Holy Spirit guided a righteous and devout man, Simeon

As he came into the Temple and held baby Jesus in his arms and praised God. Luke 2:27-28

In Luke 2:37-38 Anna, a prophet,

*"never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.
At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to
all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."*

Already we have a sense of wonder about Jesus in the temple.

When Jesus is 12 years old, he is in the temple and we hear in Luke 2:46-47 he is,

*"sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.
And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers."*

Then in Luke's Gospel, after his adult ministry in Galilee, we have an extended road journey to Jerusalem and to the Temple.

Jesus told a parable about two men who went up to the temple to pray. Luke 18:10

When he arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple to pray and began clearing it.

Luke 19:45

We are told in Luke 19:47 that Jesus was teaching in the temple.

“Every day he was teaching in the temple and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called.

And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.”

Luke 21:37-38

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples,

“were continually in the temple blessing God.” Luke 24:53

After the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we are told,

“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home...” ACTS 2:46

After the apostles were arrested and put in prison, an angel opened the door during the night, brought them out and told them,

“Go, stand in the temple and tell the whole message about this life.” ACTS 5:20

“When they heard this, they entered the temple at day-break and went on with their teaching” ACTS 5:21

“And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah”. ACTS 5:42

Appreciating the Temple’s enormous significance for the Jewish people, and

- the REVELATION of Jesus in the temple,
- the TEACHING of Jesus in the Temple,
- the CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES in the Temple,

Today’s Gospel **SHOCKS** and **STUNS**.

“When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said,

“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” Luke 21:5-6

- not just superficial damage,
- not just major damage,
- but utter **DEVASTATION** – not one stone left upon another

Preaching in the early 30s AD, this prediction of Jesus will eventuate in 70AD when the Roman army destroys the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

And in the 80s or 90s AD, the Gospel of Luke will once again highlight this shocking prediction.

And yet in devastation, it was not the end of the world.

The Temple pointed to the glory of God.

The Temple was not God.

We learn that **JESUS IS THE TEMPLE**.

We learn that Jesus points **THE WAY TO THE FATHER**.

How do we face utter devastation, only to learn there is hope and love and life?

Jesus said,

“By your endurance you will gain your souls.” LK 21:19

The word ‘Endurance’ for the Greek [hupomone ὑπομονή](#) implies **STEADFASTNESS** in faith that overcomes trials, and overcomes what we feel as devastation at the time.

In 2009 one of the priests in northern Iraq thought it a possibility, not a prediction, that Christian heritage might be destroyed in several years hence.

How could they endure?

So he organised a film crew

To record Christian heritage sites,

To interview the Christian people themselves as a living treasure,

After much prayer to vision and for those people who might need refuge.

He sought ways of preparing for peace in the future, and working for peace now.

Realistic, yet a person of hope and vision.

Today he is known as Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil.

Our new Iraqi and Syrian parish families tell the tragic stories of devastation,

To their homes and towns, their schools, their churches,

To the centre of their **FAITH, IDENTITY, UNITY,** and **CULTURE.**

Yet their strong personal, communal and living relationship with Jesus Christ upholds them

As they make a new home here in Brisbane.

As it does for our friends, the two Iraqi Religious Sisters,

Sister Azhar and Sister Samar, who studied in Brisbane and returned to Iraq to minister to their people.

Let us pause and pray for those facing incredible hardships anywhere and for the gift of a loving, uplifting relationship with God.

Our faith in God our Creator, calls us to **SOLIDARITY** with each other and our world.

Amen.

Fr Gerry Hefferan – ‘Devastated Yet Uplifted in God’ – 13 November 2016

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/111316.cfm>]

[Image/Article: [Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh celebrates Mass for the first time in two years](#)] [Parish Facebook: <http://tinyurl.com/gphwtkg>]