

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19 [18]; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up

John 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

John 2:23 When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This passage is important historically and theologically. The Temple Action (to give it a neutral title — it is more than a "cleansing" —) was one of the two events that moved the religious authorities in Jerusalem to act against Jesus. Combined with the messianic entry, the Temple Action constituted a threat both religious and political. As a result, scholars usually affirm the historicity of the event, even though it is reported differ-

ently in John and in the Synoptic Gospels. It is also important theologically. The moralising tradition usually assumes some kind of abuse or sharp practice in the Temple. But the provision of animals and a currency exchange service were both required for the ordinary functioning of the Temple. Attacking the sellers was attacking the Temple *as such* and this was well understood by the authorities. Jesus' action critiqued the Temple as the unique point of access to God. He had already implied this in his ministry and teaching: the kingdom of God is *among you*.

There is a question regarding the *timing* of the incident. In the other Gospels, it happens during Jesus' only visit to Jerusalem. In John, where there are many visits to Jerusalem (historically probable), the incident takes place at the very start (historically improbable).

KIND OF WRITING

Our passage belongs to a familiar type of writing from the Bible, that of "prophetic action." From time to time, prophetic figures dramatised their teaching by an action, a kind of *tableau vivant*. Examples in the Hebrew Bible are: Isaiah gives symbolic names to his children (Is 7:3; 8:14); Jeremiah: the waist cloth hidden by the Euphrates (Jer 13:1-11); Ezekiel makes a model of Jerusalem (Ez 4:1-3). Examples in the New Testament are: the calling of the Twelve, open table-fellowship, the entry into Jerusalem, the Temple Action, the Last Supper. The prophecy of Agabus (Acts 21:10-14) illustrates prophetic actions especially well and shows that the tradition was alive and well in the first century.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

(i) The appropriate OT background is the general importance of the Temple right through the biblical period, from Solomon to its destruction in 70 AD. The location of the Temple in Jerusalem

Thought for the day

In the Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox traditions, faith and reason are not in fundamental contradiction. At the same time, there is something radically irreducible and paradoxical in our faith. It was expressed a long time ago by Bishop Robinson, *the scandalous particularity of the incarnation*. And we may add, *of the crucifixion*. The Christian vision, for us, is indeed something wonderful. Nevertheless, let's not forget that for many today, it is in a way too wonderful, too strange and actually unbelievable. That natural resistance can be part of our faith too!

Prayer

God, we come to you through the cloud of unknowing, because you are always greater, greater than our minds, greater than our hearts. Help us to stand before the bright darkness of your mysterious Being that we may come to know you as you really are.

placed the cult under the patronage of the king and was thus a political act. When the Temple was destroyed under Nebuchadnezzar, the people were bereft of contact with God. After the Exile in Babylon, the building of the Second Temple greatly preoccupied those who had returned. The rebuilding of that Temple under Herod the Great was the major construction project of his reign. A very high proportion of the economy of Jerusalem depended on the Temple and any disturbance had consequences.

(ii) On that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the Lord." And the cooking pots in the house of the Lord shall be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar; and every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and use them to boil the flesh of the sacrifice. *And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.* (Zech 14:20-21; a messianic text.)

(iii) *It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have*

fallen on me. (Psa 69:9; a passion text for NT writers, adjusted by the writer.)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

(i) *The Temple Action*

In the Synoptic Gospels this story is not only reported at another time but the vocabulary and reaction are different.

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. (Mark 11:15–19)

(ii) *The Temple Saying*

In Matthew and Mark, the saying is on the lips of *false* witnesses and is repeated at the crucifixion by those who *deride* Jesus (Matt 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29). Luke has no place for the *destruction* of the Temple because the first disciples continue to pray there; therefore he omits the sentence both at the trial and at the crucifixion. He does, however, know about it: *For we have heard him saying that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.* (Acts 6:14)

(iii) *Worship in John*

Worship is theme of John 1-4. See John 1:18; 2:21; 3:3; 4:19-26. Jesus’ death (Ps 69) and resurrection (v. 22) are also in the mind of the writer at this point.

ST PAUL

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

(1 Cor 3:16–17)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 13 There are three Passovers in this Gospel, of which this is the first. Passover was the climax of the worshiping year and the busiest time in Jerusalem.

Verse 14 These were required by the Bible itself for the functioning of the Temple. John has no sense that sellers are robbers. Money changers were necessary because you could not use coins with images of any kind on them, such as Roman denarii or Attic drachmas.

Verse 15 The action itself is exceptional for its vigour and violence.

Verse 16 Not unlike the comment in Psalm 50: “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” (Psa 50:12–13) The explicit reference is to Zech 14:20-21, a text with messianic overtones at the time.

Verse 17 A first reaction. Remembering under the power of the Spirit is part of the Johannine appropriation of the Jesus tradition. *But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.* (John 14:26) Psalm 69 is widely referred to in the New Testament but usually in connection with the crucifixion.

Verse 18 A double level of meaning. Authority is the question in the Synoptic Gospels, but John has a “signs Gospel”. It is often thought that John 1-12 is structured around a Signs Source, with the following content: changing water into wine (2:1–11), healing an official’s son (4:46–54) and a lame man (5:2–9), feeding the multitude (6:1–14)—probably together with crossing the sea (6:15–25), giving sight to a blind man (9:1–8), and raising Lazarus (11:1–45). The big sign remains the lifting up on the cross into resurrection.

Verse 19 The Temple saying is here

placed on the lips of Jesus himself.

Verse 20 If you took the John version as historical, this would yield a date.

Verse 21 The voice of the writer intrudes, speaking directly to the reader.

Verse 22 A good example of Johannine remembering later. Notice that Jesus’ word is equated with scripture.

Verse 23 Cf. Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” (John 6:26–27)

Verses 24–25 This extra knowledge of Jesus is characteristic of the Johannine Jesus.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. We all tend to confine God to received traditions (places, images, words) but we know that “God is greater than our conscience.” (1 John 3:20) How do I experience that “more” of God and keep it before my eyes?

2. Jesus himself is the “locus” of God’s presence for us, a presence found in life, through others, in the Word of God and in the sacraments. What have been my own moments of encounter, with him who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction?

PRAYER

Holy God, the folly of the cross mocks our human wisdom and the weakness of the crucified puts worldly power to shame.

Banish from our hearts every pretence of might and knowledge, that, by the power flowing from Christ’s resurrection, your people may be raised up from the death of sin and fashioned into a living temple of your glory.

Grant this through Christ, our liberator from sin, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, holy and mighty God for ever and ever. Amen.

Lent 1	Genesis 9:8-15	Noah	Ps 25 (24)	1 Peter 3:18-22	Mark 1:12-15
Lent 2	Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 14-18	Abraham	Ps (116) 115	Rom 8:31-34	Mark 9:2-10
Lent 3	Exodus 20:1-17	Moses	Ps (19) 18	1 Cor 1:22-25	John 2:13-25
Lent 4	2 Chron 36:14-16, 19-23	Exile	Ps 137 (136)	Eph 2:4-10	John 3:14-21
Lent 5	Jeremiah 31:31-34	New Covenant	Ps 51 (50)	Heb 5:7-9	John 12:20-33

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom

1 Cor 1:18 *For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* 19 *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will thwart the cleverness of the intelligent."* 20 *Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the Mosaic law? Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made the wisdom of the world foolish?* 21 *For since in the wisdom of God the world by its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased to save those who believe by the foolishness of preaching.* 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

It is perfectly understandable that Paul never forgot his own sense of shock at the crucifixion. This degrading punishment was reserved for rebels, terrorists, slaves and the very worst of criminals. Only much later did it become a badge, even a decoration or a piece of jewellery. Such an evolution would have been unthinkable to all first-century men and women. It means, even today, that at the heart of the Christian proclamation, we find a shocking paradox, expressed boldly here by Paul, in all its apparent contradictions.

The Gospel has the same unexpected line of thought: *destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* The first reading and Psalm remind us that there was before a *path* to God—the Torah, evoked in the the person of Moses. Now, however, our way to God is a *person*: *For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ.* (John 1:17)

Behind our text, there is also something more overtly political. It seems that Paul had been replaced in the affections of the Corinthians by the silver-tongued Apollos from Alexandria in Egypt.

KIND OF WRITING

Chapters 1-4 form a unit of dense argumentation, broadly under the following headings: wisdom / foolishness (1:18-31); Spirit Wisdom (2:1-16); the role of the apostles (3:1-15). Our section

is part of 1:18-31, which has the following steps:

- 1:18: *propositio* or main topic
- 1:19-25: the cross as paradox
- 1:26-31: illustration—the Corinthians
- 2:1-5: illustration—Paul

The first proof here begins in v. 19 with a scripture citation (Is 29:14) and then continues in paradoxical fashion until v. 25. Paul risks illustrating God's use of the foolish by naming the Corinthians themselves. He takes the harm out of this by going on to name himself as an illustration of God's use of weakness. As always, our few verses make sense only in the light of the whole paragraph, given above.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Among the many issues in the Corinthians community, two act as a frame for all the other instructions. At the start, there is a teaching about the paradox of the cross (ch. 1) and at the end a proclamation of the resurrection (ch. 15). It is certainly the case that at least some Corinthians believed Jesus was risen but not that the dead would rise. It seems also that some, at least, were minded to ignore the crucifixion and concentrate instead on the spiritual gifts and on wisdom insights. Paul relativises human eloquence, very attractive to the Corinthians, by singling out the paradox of the cross at the very start of the letter.

RELATED PASSAGES

Guard against self-deception, each of you. If someone among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become foolish so that he can become wise. For the wisdom of this age is foolishness with God. As it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness." And again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." So then, no more boasting about mere mortals! For everything belongs to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. (1Corinthians 3:18-23)

But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me.

Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 22 In Romans, we might be distinguishing Jews and Greeks, but here it seems to be *hendiadys*, using two words to say one thing, all of humanity. However, there may still be distinction.

Verse 23 Jews prefer clear saving events, which the cross certainly is not. Gentiles are attracted to rational philosophies, and for them too the cross is a stumbling block, lit. a *skandalon*. The proclamation ought to be different, ought to be difficult, because God has done something extraordinary and unpredictable. The smooth logic of human wisdom cannot easily accommodate the cross. Cf. *Now, brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offence (= skandalon) of the cross has been removed.* (Galatians 5:11)

Verse 24 The "called" is Paul's general word of Christians. Earlier, he had already referred to two groups, those perishing and the saved (1 Cor 1:18). Power of God: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* (Romans 1:16; Rom 1:4, 16, 20; 9:17; 15:13, 19; etc.). Wisdom of God: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how fathomless his ways!* (Romans 11:33; Rom 11:33; 1 Cor 1:17, 19-22, 24, 30; 2:1, 4-7, 13; 3:19; 12:8; 2 Cor 1:12).

Verse 25 The sharpest paradox of all.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Have I ever felt challenged by the paradox of the cross? What place has it now in my spiritual life?
2. Have I known in my life the power of the cross and its unexpected wisdom? How do I express this reality to myself?

PRAYER

God of surprises, surprise us again with the paradox of your power and wisdom in our lives. May we never grow complacent about your astonishing love, that we may say with St Paul, *the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Amen. Alleluia (even if forbidden)!

Then God spoke all these words

Ex. 20:1 Then God spoke all these words: 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, 6 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Ex. 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Ex. 20:12 Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. 17 You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Known in Hebrew as “The Ten Words” (whence our “Decalogue”), the Ten Commandments are presented as the Lord’s direct address to the people of Israel. Other special features: the Decalogue is offered (uniquely) twice; the Ten Commandments precede the Law; the two stone tables indicate divine authority; they are equated with the covenant between God and Israel (Ex 31:18; 34:28-29; Deut 4:13-14; 8:11, 15).

The rest of the Law is a development of

the foundational guidelines found in the Decalogue. It is suspected by scholars that the Exodus version is earlier than the version in Deuteronomy. Jews, Catholics and Protestants number the commandments slightly differently.

KIND OF WRITING

Our text is a theophany with a covenant layout. Such documents show the following features: (1) Identification of the covenant giver; (2) Historical prologue; (3) Stipulations; (4) Provision for deposit and public reading; (5) Witnesses; (6) Blessing and curses; (7) Ratification ceremony. Steps 1, 2 and 3 are reflected in our reading.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The book of Exodus may be outlined as follows:

1. Israel in Egypt (1:1–12:36)
2. Exodus Events (12:37–15:21)
3. Wilderness Wanderings (15:22–18:27)
4. Sinai Experiences (19:1–40:30)

RELATED PASSAGES

Cf. Deut 5:6-21.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 The theophany opens with God speaking directly to the people.

Verse 2 The covenant giver identifies himself by means of the historical prologue. In Hebrew “before me” has several simultaneous meanings: in front of me; in addition to me; in place of me; over against me.

Verse 4-6 Vv. 4-6 elaborate on vv. 2-3. Israelite faith is to be aniconic, that is, no images, because of the risk that images will be mistaken for the reality. Cf. Deut 4:15-19; 30:17; Josh 23:16.

Verse 7 The word “wrongful” (traditionally translated as “in vain”) means emptily, to no good purpose.

Verse 8 The weekly Sabbath is unknown in Israel before the great Exile in Babylon (there was a monthly observance in the eighth century). In Deuteronomy, the Sabbath is God’s command (Deut 5:12, 15) and in Exodus his gift (Ex 20:11).

The motivation in Deuteronomy is given as the memorial of the Exodus, a reminder of slavery and the treatment of

slaves. In Exodus, the motivation is rooted in the creation story.

Verse 12 Honouring parents is analogous to honouring God (the same language is used). It has to do with how grown up children care for their older parents (cf. Deut 21:18-21).

Verse 13 No killing *whatsoever*.

Verse 14 This is also against harming your neighbour, in the first instance.

Verse 15 This may originally have meant “steal your neighbour” (cf. Gen 37:26-28) but as it stands it means not harming your neighbour by taking what is his/hers.

Verse 16 Justice in court depended directly on people telling the truth. Otherwise, justice itself is in jeopardy and the fabric of a just society unravels. In particular, the poor were vulnerable to this treatment (Ex 23:1-3, 6-9). More ordinary lying, such as gossip and slander, is not excluded (Lev 19:11, 16)!

Verse 17 Unrestrained desire is what is in view here. Cf. 1 Kings 21. The heart of Old Testament ethics is the interior disposition. Cf. the penetrating Is 58:1-9.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Take the very words of God here: “I am the Lord your God”. The very ground of our being comes to us and offers us his covenant love. Prayer of the mystery of God.

2. Read through the commandments slowly and see if there is a word of guidance you yourself need at this moment in your life. Prayer of conversion.

3. In the Old Testament as well, it is the interior disposition which truly matters (cf. Is 58 and Ps 51). Jesus’ own teaching about interior disposition is perfectly in line with that, taking it more deeply into the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Read Mt 5:21-37. Prayer of the heart.

PRAYER

God of the covenant, you are full of compassion and faithfulness, slow to anger and abounding in love.

In Jesus, your word to us was always “yes” and in him we hear the yes to all your promises.

Open our hearts that we respond to your great gifts so that all we do and say and are may be a yes to you from the depths of our hearts.

THE LITURGY

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19 [18]; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

THE THREE READINGS

The Temple, with its elaborate rituals and external appearance, was the centre of worship for Jews, just as the Commandments were at the centre of life. In a radical move towards the interior, in the Fourth Gospel, the place of the Temple is taken by Jesus himself. In him, we find our motive and our life-spring to live the gospel vision.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The Psalm, in praise of the Law, really takes up the move to the interior disposition of heart found in the last commandment. Notice the emphasis on reviving the soul and gladdening the heart.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First Reading

Exodus 20:1-17

Sometimes people wonder if the Ten Commandments have gone away. While some of the content naturally reflects the culture of the time, the fundamental picture of human rights and duties remains valid today. We could even say it is the foundation of the western development of law and human rights.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

At the centre of Christian faith stands the difficult, enigmatic teaching of the cross. St Paul goes so far even to speak of God's foolishness and weakness. This paradox yields a deep insight into the heart of Christian teaching.

Gospel

John 2:13-25

The Temple Action was a powerful prophetic gesture of Jesus. He challenged not just the financial side of temple worship, but the principle of this kind of worship at all. It prepares the reader a later sentence of Jesus in this Gospel: God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 4 March

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St Casimir

2 Kings 5:1-15

A very lively, realistic story prepares us for the Gospel reading. There are comic elements: the disappointment of Naaman and the utterly sensible advice of his servants.

Luke 4:24-30

Our reading is really the second part of an integrated scene in Luke's Gospel. Jesus preaches in Nazareth and is initially well received. What we really have here is a symbolic *tableau*, giving us the whole Gospel story of Jesus in a nutshell. The last elusive line points to Easter.

Tuesday 5 March

St Kieran, bishop

Daniel 3:25, 34-43

The context for this wonderful prayer can help a great deal. The book of Daniel was written during a time of brutal persecution under the Syrian ruler, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Under the guise of the time of the earlier Babylonians, the book of Daniel really reflects this later, highly dangerous situation. The three main characters have been thrown into the fiery furnace and one of them, Azariah, prays this great prayer.

Matthew 18:21-35

Our first reading was a prayer for mercy from God. The Gospel is also about mercy, but in another perspective. Mercy is given to a great debtor, who begs precisely for mercy. But he in his turn refuses mercy to a fellow servant, who begged him. It is all a comment on the words we pray everyday: *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Wednesday 6 March

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

Our reading reflects on God's grace to Israel and on the consequent responsibility of the Israelites to live lives consistent with that grace. It was true long ago in Judaism; it is true today in our Christian proclamation.

Matthew 5:17-19

Matthew can disconcert with his quite conservative attitudes. It is important to remember that the Law (the Torah)

meant three things at the time: the Pentateuch, the moral law and the ritual. The moral law is, if anything, sharpened.

Thursday 7 March

Sts Perpetua and Felicity, martyrs

Jeremiah 7:23-28

The ministry of Jeremiah encountered tremendous opposition. In fact, his book is divided into two parts, the first devoted to a rehearsal of the collapse of the independent kingdom of Judah. Within that, Jeremiah points out that the very faithlessness of the people was one of the causes of that calamity.

Luke 11:14-23

Just as the prophets encountered opposition, so did the Jesus. In the case of Jesus, the opposition accuses God's prophet of aligning himself with the forces of evil. Already in Luke's Gospel, we hear the story of the temptation, wherein Jesus resolutely rejects the devil.

Friday 8 March

St John of God, religious

Hosea 14:2-10

Hosea wrote in the 8th century BC, at a time of immense pressure from Assyria. He can be trenchant but is also a marvellous poet of the love of God. Listen by letting any of the moving metaphors touch our hearts.

Mark 12:28-34

This great passages takes us to the heart to of the preaching of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

Saturday 9 March

St Frances of Rome, religious

Hosea 5:15-6:6

This is really a sarcastic reading. But, behind the biting sarcasm, is the beating heart of God, reaching out to us again and again.

Luke 18:9-14

The risk for us in reading this parable is that we find ourselves sitting in judgment on the Pharisee—that is, copying him in sitting in judgment on the tax collector. The heart-felt prayer for mercy is at the centre: can I make it my own?