Devotion for Thursday after Fourth Sunday of Lent – *The Temple* - 10 March 2016, Anno Domini

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The Minster at York

***1****And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!* ***2****And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.* ***3****And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately,* ***4****Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?* ***5****And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you:* ***6****For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.* ***7****And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.* ***8****For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.* ***9****But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.* ***10****And the gospel must first be published among all nations.* ***11****But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.* ***12****Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.* ***13****And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* (Mark 13:1-13)

            Many of the physical manifestations of the Old Testament are merely shadows of their spiritual fulfillment in the New Testament. The text today points directly to the true Temple of God which is Christ. We become part of that Temple when we find a refuge in the Heart of Christ.  As Jesus prophesizes, this physical Temple shall be done away, along with its bloody sacrifices, and the true Temple of God shall be rebuilt (resurrected) after three days. He became our all-sufficient blood sacrifice for our redemption.

            In yesterday’s devotion, we read of the widow and her two mites cast into the treasury. You will recall that she cast in ALL that she had. We have not done so. We have no cause for spiritual pride for we have not given ALL of our time, our study, our thoughts, or our resources to God. We often take far greater pleasure in reading of the grace and mercy of Christ than we take in reading His critical counsel to us, but the latter is just as directly addressed to us as the former. In today’s text, Christ again issues a counsel of warning to us and to all generations of men and women. The warnings involve a great deception that shall sweep across the landscape of faith and religious belief – the deception of the anti-Christ whose influence has been felt from the age of the Apostles until now. Remember, being a Christian does not mean all of our troubles and tribulations are at an end but, rather, just beginning. God will not clear the road ahead of obstacles, but He will provide us grace to overcome. We may not like our spinach, children, but we must eat it along with the ice cream.

***1******And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!*** You will note the high admiration men have for the physical structure to the absolute disregard of the Being to whom the structure is dedicated. Men would prefer to worship in grey stone cathedrals where God is not than in the clefts of the Rock where God is. It would be wise to observe that Christ was represented in the Temple worship, but now all that the Temple worship represented is standing beside the disciples and they wonder at the stones of that Temple. Jesus tells us of the true Temple in this: ***Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*** (Temple of his body). (John 2:19-21) Moreover, Christ is represented by all that the Temple provided, but He is more than all of that: ***6 But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. 7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.*** (Matt 12:6-8) In the mind of the world, big is better. In the Mind of God pure and true is always better.

***2******And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down****.* All of the grand and expensive houses of worship shall likewise be destroyed in the day of trouble, but the true Temple of God shall stand unmoved. A church group is often organized with a fervent desire to serve and follow Christ, yet, in their enthusiasm to build a structure suitable to their worship (and better than anyone else’s) they build and labor until one day, it is apparent that they have forgotten the Lord for whom the building was erected. ***Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain***. (Psalm 127:1) How often have we heard the plaintive sigh, “**Oh well, if it is a true church, it will grow**?” Really? Do we suppose that the world does not build larger and more opulent churches than the people of God? God does not emphasize growth, but faithfulness. Without faith, the church may grow but be absent the very Person for whom it has been constructed! Christ’s prophecy was literally fulfilled to the letter when the Roman Legions surrounded and destroyed Jerusalem under General Titus in 70 Anno Domini. The very stones of the Temple were dislodged by Roman soldiers seeking the hidden gold of the Temple (Josephus).

***3******And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately****,* ***4******Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled****?* The mysteries of God are never revealed to us in an instant. We must first diligently study the Word and prayerfully seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost in revealing the hidden gems of wonder therein. But, even so, God reveals His Truth as a beautiful Rose that opens gradually during the Spring rains. He allows us to see and understand those things that are needful in their time. As we view prophecy, we may do so best by the mirror. We look back on fulfilled prophecy and can see the amazing exactitude with which God has acted to bring His prophecies to pass in every detail. Those future events that are coming to fulfillment may escape our understanding until God deigns to reveal them to us. We must look with faith to the future and heed His warnings of what the future will bring.

***5******And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you:*** This is a vital and serious warning - not some particular man, or some class of men, but **ANY** man! That includes self-proclaimed prophets, clergy, politicians, and our own brothers and sisters of the faith. Perhaps God made Psalm 118:8 the very center verse of the Bible for a purpose: ***It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man***. (Psalm 118:8) He reinforces this principle in Acts 5:29 - ***We ought to obey God rather than men***. This refers to ALL men – governmental, social, religious, or military. If it were not a certain fact that men would arise who sought to deceive, Christ would not have given the warning. Unfortunately, the gravest deceit is presented, not from the brothels and casinos of the world, but from the pulpits thereof.

***6******For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. 7 And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.*** Not a few, but MANY, shall come forward proclaiming themselves to be the anointed ones to lead us into greater spiritual places. They will use the name of God to defy His own Word to us. Be not disturbed greatly at news of impending wars and crises for these will surely come to fruition before the end. In his Farewell Address to the Cadet Corps at West Point, N.Y. in 1962, General Douglas MacArthur quoted Plato in warning: “Only the Dead have seen the end of War!” How true. Despite the best efforts of man, wars have actually proliferated since the efforts begun by the League of Nations, and later the United nations, to impede its progress.  It may be that man’s best efforts simply reveal man’s most profound inability.

***8 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in diver’s places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows****.* Have we not heard more and more of these events occurring with ever increasing regularity? Are there not a greater measure of earthquakes and tsunamis occurring around the world than ever before? The Tectonic Plates deep under the earth’s surface are wearing more brittle with movement and create greater fissures at the surface than ever before. Wars of religion, the most inhumane and cruel of all, are happening ever where and there is no place to which we may flee to escape these wars of terror. Do not allow the tabloid prophets to deceive you into believing that these wars and phenomenon mark the end, for they do not. They are mere buds on the fig tree, and are merely the BEGINNING of sorrows.

***9******But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them***. In the name of God (or Allah), they shall deliver you to the magistrate and courts of injustice for the sake of Christ and His Gospel. We may be beaten, tortured, and even killed for the name of Christ. It is not a development which careful living can avoid – Christ simply warns us to expect such treatment for, to be forewarned, is to be forearmed. Look at the followers of the false prophet, Mohammad: they are taught even in their presumed Holy Book (Quran) that to kill or behead unbelievers (in Islam) is a favor to Allah (their false god). ***They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service***. (John 16:2)

***10******And the gospel must first be published among all nations***. With the exception of diverse small tribes scattered about, this has virtually been accomplished among the nations of the earth. God never sends judgment without first sending a warning (i.e. Nineveh).

***11******But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.***.  We are not to concern ourselves with what defense we shall give when falsely accused, but depend upon the agency and counsel of the Holy Ghost at that hour just as the blessed Stephen did before his being martyred. I trust that same Holy Ghost gave unto Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worchester, the same words which resounded throughout England and the world following his death at the stake in 1555: “*Be of good cheer, master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle in England, as I hope, by God's grace, shall never be put out.”* The words were, indeed, prophetic for they saw their fulfillment in the eyes of many standing by at the stake of Latimer’s martyrdom that day.

***12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death****.* This is a cherished object of every totalitarian power – to make the state of greater influence than the family even. In communist regimes, the child is taught in school to seek out Bibles in the family’s house and report the parents. Many suffer in cruel prisons of North Korea today for this very offense. Please observe the abysmal state of respect for parents in our own country today. In fact, many homes are so broken that there is only one parent available to dishonor.

***13******And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved****.* Christ says that we shall be hated of whom? He says, “***of all men***!” The world hates Christ because Christ condemns the world! Why do you suppose that there is such a fiery passion to relegate the holy days (the root meaning **of holi-day**) to secular terms? The Easter Holiday celebrated from the birth of our nation until recent times has been re-designated as Spring Break, Christmas as Winter Break, and Thanksgiving as ‘Turkey Day’ or Fall Break. What is in the nature of the proper terms for these Holy Days that causes such anguish among those who claim not to believe, or could it be that “***the devils know and tremble***?” (James 2:19). The Gospel of St Matthew adds this unhappy note: ***And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold***. (Matt 24:12) The ‘many’ referred to here are not those of the world, but those of the faith. The Gospel of Luke adds to the commentary but ends with hope***: And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.  And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.  But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls.*** (Luke 21:16-19) To those genuinely saved and abiding in Christ, there shall no great danger deter from the Narrow Way that leads up to Heaven, but those whose testimony is uncertain and conditional, are doomed to fall from the promise that they previously have taken in Christ.

The patience of Job may be required of all who are privileged to wait until the Coming Day of the Lord.