

Saturday's Gospel: Simplicity of Heart

Gospel for Saturday in the 8th
Week of Ordinary Time, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Mk* 11:27-33)

They came again to Jerusalem. And as Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”

Jesus said to them, “I will ask you a question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these

things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men? Answer me.” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But shall we say, ‘From men?’”—they were afraid of the people, for all held that John was a real prophet. So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Commentary

Jesus’ purification of the Temple astonished the Jewish religious leaders. It seemed to be a restoration of worship there, like that which took place in the time of the Maccabees. This had been a very solemn celebration – “they celebrated it for eight days with joy” (cf. *2 Mac* 10:6) –

because the enemies of God's people who desecrated his Temple had been defeated. But now the desecration came from within: the authorities had allowed the House of God to stop being a house of prayer and become a house of money-making. A higher power, that of Jesus, was needed to restore order in that holy place.

The ensuing dialogue also surprises us. Faced with a question about his authority, Jesus responds with another question by which he invites them to examine their conscience. This is what our Lord often does when he finds a hostile attitude towards his actions and teachings. Whoever had listened to the Baptist and accepted his preaching was well disposed to welcome Jesus as Teacher. But those religious leaders had not humbly welcomed John's ministry. They refused to recognize the truth of those prophetic words, applied to the Precursor: "he is like a

refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord" (*Malachi* 3:2-3). Since they had refused to accept the purification of their hearts, they did not understand the purification of the Temple.

Those men were not simple as doves; that is why Jesus showed himself to be wise as a serpent (cf. *Mt* 10:16), and left them speechless. Sincere dialogue was impossible. Sincerity is needed for understanding with people, and first of all, with God. It is a virtue that leads to simplicity. We see this in the Virgin Mary, in her dialogue with the archangel, which ended with the simplicity shown in her words of self-giving: "be it done unto to me according to your word." We ask our Lady to obtain for us the simplicity we need to draw close to

God, and by knowing Him better each day, to know ourselves better. Thus, with the awareness that we too are temples of God (cf. *1 Cor* 3:16-17), we will want the purification that our sins require.

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