

## The Cleansing of the Temple

### According to Mark

The Cleansing of the Temple is one of those rare stories that is told in all four Gospels. This Sunday's Gospel presents John's account. True to his overriding theme, John emphasizes Christ's divinity and presents the reason for the Cleansing as Christ replacing the temple as the center of worship. "*Destroy this temple (that is, Christ) and in three days I will raise it up* (John 2:19)." John places this scene at the beginning of Jesus' ministry as opposed to the Synoptic Gospels who place it at the end. Right up front, like an overture of an opera, John delivers his thesis: Jesus is the Christ—the divine Son of God.

Mark's Gospel seems to have a different purpose for the Cleansing. He sandwiches the story in the middle of an odd story of Jesus cursing an unfruitful fig tree. Before the Cleansing, Jesus approaches a fig tree and sees that it has no produce on it. Mark tells us that "it was not the time for figs (Mark 11:13)." He's telling us that Jesus' curse isn't directed so much at that particular tree but rather that he is making a symbolic statement.

The Adam and Eve story of the Eating of the Fruit never mentions the type of fruit. For unusual reasons, we tend to think of the fruit as the apple, but the Jews of Jesus' day believed it was a fig—a much better guess, given that Adam and Eve made garments of fig leaves. So when Jesus says to the fig tree, "May no one ever eat of your fruit again (Mark 11:14)," Mark is telling us that Jesus is the New Adam. Jesus then cleans the temple and afterwards, Peter sees the fig tree and exclaims, "Look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered (Mark 11:21)." In cleansing the Temple, Jesus, the New Adam, has rolled back the tragedy of the sin of humanity. There is no longer a need for a temple because humanity has returned to Eden and the poisonous fruit of sin is no longer a threat.

Often in paintings of the crucifixion, one sees a skull at the foot of the Cross of Christ. It is Adam's skull. The blood of Christ washes over Adam, bringing him (and us!) back to life.

Praised be Jesus Christ, New Adam, New Temple, Son of God, Savior of Humanity!

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*Note: Most of the ideas presented here are those of the brilliant bible scholar and native-son, Doctor Brant Pitre.*

