

EMPTY TEMPLE:
Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth
Charity is better than sacrifices
Exiling God from our places of prayer.

“Your Majesty”, said the servant to the king. “The holy Man Narottam never enters your holy temple. If you were to go to the grove along the road, you would see people hastening there to hear him sing the praises of God as the bees swarm about the white lotus. Meanwhile, your temple stands empty and no one fills the golden honey jar”

The King humiliated in his heart, went to the field where Narottam was sitting on the grass and praying and said to him: “My Father, why do you sit here in the dust of the field in order to preach the love of God and pray to Him, instead of going to the temple with the gold dome”? “Because God is not in your temple”, Narottam answered.

The King was angered and said: “Don’t you realize that 20 million pieces of gold went into putting up that splendid building and it was consecrated with very costly rites”

“Yes, I realize that”, said Narottam; “that was the year in which fire destroyed the town and thousands of people knocked in vain at your door. Then, God said, “This wretched fellow will not provide my children, all brothers and sisters, with a roof, yet he wants to put up one for me!” And so, God went up to stay with the destitute, under the tree along the road. All that golden pomp you speak about is as empty within, as the hot breath of your own pride”. Yours is an empty temple”

The King was enraged and shouted at him: “Leave my Kingdom”. The Holy Man answered peacefully: “You are but exiling me from the land whence you have already exiled my God”!

(Rabindranath Tagore (“ The Harvest”))

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did Narottam refuse to preach to the people and pray and have bhajans in the King’s temple?
2. What did Narottam mean by saying that God was not in the temple the king had built?
3. Was Narottam right by telling the King that he had exiled God from his Kingdom? Why?

4. Does God need marble and golden temples to live in and to be worshipped? Why?
5. Where does God really dwell? What does you make say so?
6. Why do kings and wealthy people build sumptuous and luxuri0us temples to God?
7. In order to pray and find God, where should we go and what should we do?
8. On what conditions only, can we find God in temples made by men?
9. Which were the favorite places Jesus used to pray? Mention them. Why Jesus did choose those spots?
10. Are there any other lessons we can learn from the story of Narottam? Mention them and comment on them.

POINTS FOR SHARING:

1. Where do you like most to pray?
2. How often do you pray?
3. How do you pray? What are your favorite prayers?
4. Do you try to find God and serve him among the poor and needy? How? Why?

IDEAS FOR AN INPUT

- God cannot be locked or kept in gold temples and palaces made by men
- God is the Master of all creation. The whole universe is his temple.
- Our temples and churches should be devout, quiet, simple and inviting to prayer, not necessarily palaces and luxurious buildings
- God is found in the depths of the human heart, specially the simple, the poor and humble people
- Jesus did go to the Temple of Jerusalem at certain times and prescribed festivals but most of the time, he prayed and preached outside the Temple
- Jesus found God his Father mainly among the poor, the illiterate, the sick, the children, the simple, the hungry and sinners
- The Shepherds had to go to a cave and stable, to find Jesus
- The Magi could not find Jesus in the Palace of King Herod, but in a simple dwelling, sort of a hut in Bethlehem.
- The best temples God has made for Himself are the humble, loving hearts of men and women
- By shunning the poor and the needy, we shun God
- God, WHEREVER WORSIPPED, has to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, not precisely in this or that temple.

TEXTS ON PRAYING AND WORSHIPPING GOD NOT NECESSARILY IN THE TEMPLE BUT ELSEWHERE.

Mt 2/12 The Magi found Jesus neither in the Temple nor in the palace of Herod.

Mt 3/12	John the Baptist preached to the people not in the temple, but in the desert
Mt 4/11	Jesus spends 40 days in the desert fasting and praying preparing himself for his public ministry
Mt Chp.5, 6, & 7	The Greatest Teachings of Jesus were given to us in the open fields, on a Mount. "Sermon of the Mount"
Mt 6/5-6	When you want to pray, shut yourself in your room and pray alone before your Heavenly Father.
Mt 9/35-38	Jesus keeps preaching through towns and villages
Mt 17/1-13	Jesus goes to a high mountain to transfigure himself and show his glory to his disciples.
Mt 24/12	Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple
Mt 25/31-46	To serve others is to serve God (Last Judgment)
Mt 26/36-46	Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane
Mk 1/35-39	Jesus prays in lonely places
Mk 3/12	Jesus preaches on the bank of the Lake
Mk 3/13-15	Jesus prays for a whole night on a hill
Mk 6/45-47	After the multiplication of bread and fish, he goes to pray all alone on a hill
Mk 7/6-8	We have to honor God with our hearts, not with our lips
Lk 1/46-53	Canticle of our Lady, God cares for the down trodden and the hungry
Lk 2/8-20	The Shepherds find Jesus in a cave and in a stable
Lk 9/1-6	Jesus sends his disciples to preach to the poor and sick.
Jn 2/13-17	Jesus drives away the merchants from the Temple. The Temple is a place of prayer, not of making business or money.
Jn 4/19-26	Jesus at the Well. God has to be worshipped not necessarily in this or that temple, but in spirit and in truth.
Jn 17/1-26	Jesus prays and institutes the Eucharist in the upper room not in the Temple of Jerusalem.

APPENDIX

From a homily on Matthew by Saint John Chrysostom, bishop

Do not adorn the church and ignore your afflicted brother

Do you want to honour Christ's body? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honour him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked. For he who said: This is my body, and made it so by his words, also said: You saw me hungry and did not feed me, and inasmuch as you did not do it for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did not do it for me. What we do here in the church requires a pure heart, not special garments; what we do outside requires great dedication.

Let us learn, therefore, to be men of wisdom and to honour Christ as he desires. For a person being honoured finds greatest pleasure in the honour he desires, not in the honour we think best. Peter thought he was honouring Christ when he refused to let him wash his feet; but what Peter wanted was not truly an honour, quite the

opposite! Give him the honour prescribed in his law by giving your riches to the poor. For God does not want golden vessels but golden hearts.

Now, in saying this I am not forbidding you to make such gifts; I am only demanding that along with such gifts and before them you give alms. He accepts the former, but he is much more pleased with the latter. In the former, only the giver profits; in the latter, the recipient does too. A gift to the church may be taken as a form of ostentation, but an alms is pure kindness. Of what use is it to weigh down Christ's table with golden cups, when he himself is dying of hunger? First, fill him when he is hungry; then use the means you have left to adorn his table. Will you have a golden cup made but not give a cup of water? What is the use of providing the table with cloths woven of gold thread, and not providing Christ himself with the clothes he needs? What profit is there in that? Tell me: If you were to see him lacking the necessary food but were to leave him in that state and merely surround his table with gold would he be grateful to you or rather would he not be angry? What if you were to see him clad in worn-out rags and stiff from the cold, and were to forget about clothing him and instead were to set up golden columns for him, saying that you were doing it in his honour? Would he not think he was being mocked and greatly insulted?

Apply this also to Christ when he comes along the roads as a pilgrim, looking for shelter. You do not take him in as your guest, but you decorate floor and walls and the capitals of the pillars. You provide silver chains for the lamps, but you cannot bear even to look at him as he lies chained in prison. Once again, I am not forbidding you to supply these adornments; I am urging you to provide these other things as well, and indeed to provide them first. No one has ever been accused for not providing ornaments, but for those who neglect their neighbour a hell awaits with an inextinguishable fire and torment in the company of the demons. Do not, therefore, adorn the church and ignore your afflicted brother, for he is the most precious temple of all.
