

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Mar 22nd 2024

The folly of protecting God!

We are close to the Holy Week. From the fourth week of Lent, the Gospel texts for the day's liturgy are almost exclusively from the Gospel of John. In the last two weeks, we have been reading about the progressive revelation of the mystery of God the Father that Jesus makes on the one side and, on the other side, the progressive rejection of the Jews who became more impenetrable to the message of Jesus.

Today's Gospel presents the second occasion Jesus' enemies wanted to stone him. The Jews were celebrating the festival of the consecration of their temple. But why this violence? They want to kill him for insulting their God. This is the irony of our religious practices even today. Many people believe they must protect their gods as though God cannot defend himself!

Jesus challenged their faulty understanding of God. He did not ask them to deny God but to probe further into the truth of that God. "You, a man, are making yourself God." Jews consider this amounts to blasphemy. But Jesus quotes their Scriptures which have God calling some people, "You are gods". The 'judges' mentioned in the scriptures were accepted as people chosen by God and responsible for passing judgment – something which belongs only to God. Therefore, in the scriptures, they were called "gods" (cf. Deut 1:17; Exod 21:6; Ps 82:6).

Christ, the Son of God, now shares his Spirit and life with those who believe in him. Thus, we, as brothers and sisters of Jesus and children of God the Father, are members of a new household.

When Jesus was told that his family wishes to see him, he clarifies this concept: Who are my mother and brothers? Those who do the will of God.

Lent is a time to ded–icate ourselves to God anew and to realise that we are members of the household of God. Identifying our behaviours and speeches unworthy of a son or daughter of God and rectifying them is essential.

Jesus is the new Temple where God would be present and accessible to all. Though they would soon desecrate this "temple" by crucifying him, the Father would re-consecrate (sanctify) him by raising him to new life.

His arguments apparently unsettled Jews and Jesus was in control of the situation. "His time had not yet come"– although it was ominously drawing closer. The final words of today's Gospel, "Many there began to believe in him" provided a positive conclusion to Jesus' long and tortuous debate with the Jewish leadership and crowds.