



Lent 3

THE NEW SHOFAR

Christ is the centre of all history and of creation

Living the commandments brings great fulfilment

We proclaim Christ Crucified a stumbling-block and foolishness

To understand today's Gospel, we need to remember how John opens his Gospel with an event from the end of the life of Jesus – the Passover and the cleansing of the Temple. It is not that he had his timeline out of kilter. He wanted his readers to understand Jesus' message and ministry through the lens of His death and resurrection. Everything the Evangelist recounts in his writings will be shaped and informed by the Resurrection of Jesus as The Christ of God.

One of the ministries He undertook was the re-establishment of the central Truth sitting at the heart of our existence as men and women in God's creation. This is most beautifully spelled out in today's psalm.

Psalm 19 is a psalm of praise, giving glory to God the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. There are great similarities between this psalm and an Akkadian god called *Shamash*. This god was celebrated as the god of light, the victor over darkness and evil. He brought justice to the world and was victorious over death. He was worshipped widely across the ancient East and appears in art work as the sun.

The Hebrew psalm takes that same thinking but shifts the focus from the sun to the One who created the sun, who controls its movements across the sky. No matter the great things celebrated in Shamash, Yahweh is greater still. God was at the centre of the whole of the universe and dominated everything that takes place within his creation.

It is vital to celebrate the reality of God

Every generation of peoples need their own equivalent of *Shamash*, something or someone to sit at the centre of their lives as a light for living. As humans, we need to explain evil in the world, our origins and our place and purpose in creation. We yearn for justice, for strength and hope when things go wrong. All men and women long to of our beginnings and our ends, along with everything in between.

I would be tempted to say the most popular *Shamash* today is the god of the self. Like the people of Babel, our Western culture likes to believe we are gods unto ourselves and reality, other people, right and wrong, institutions and truth itself are all to be understood in terms of their impact on ourselves. We shape ourselves into the sun at the centre of a universe of our own making. That is so far removed from

the vision of today's psalmist. If we cannot begin each day, every event in our lives with Yahweh our God and end each event and day in the same way, then we have lost sight of the One True Creator and redeemer of all.

The problem of the Ten Commandments

It does not matter if, like the Jewish faithful, we believe God gave us ten commandments or 613. What is crucial for faith in God is our understanding and acceptance of the reality that God has created us for His purposes and we can only become fully human and rejoice in the fullness of life, when we live according to that divinely established Way. Not our way. Not the way of our personal Shamash. God's Way, the Way pursued and lived out by Jesus Christ. As He Himself declared – I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life.

We are reminded today of the importance of prayerfully discerning our inner-Shamash, those "things" within our hearts and minds that crowd our God from the central place in our lives. Lent is the core time in our liturgical lives when this becomes our primary vocation. How much time and effort does God manage to receive from us? What does soak up most of our time? Our planning and daily activities? How do we allow God to interact with what we are planning and doing?

Christ, not the Temple is the meeting place between God and humans

The narrative of the cleansing of the Temple needs to be read in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. He was sent by the Father to be the one and only meeting place between heaven and earth. Look what happened to the temple built by human hands when the processes of worship, the ritual of sacrifice and the bureaucracy of religion failed to bring people into communion with God. It had to be cleansed, torn down (the Romans did that in 70 A.D.) – which is reflected in the death of Jesus and His burial in the tomb. Only then could communion become a reality for those willing to follow the Way of Christ – celebrated in His Resurrection.

There was no place holier than the Temple in Jerusalem – until the coming of Christ. Now, as we the faithful take Christ *to the very ends of the earth*, and this Temple, greater than the magnificent building erected by Solomon, is the home of God among all people.

Christ our Mediator

Nothing now stands between us and God. We are in communion with the Almighty when we are at one with Christ and through Christ as one with our brothers and sisters. But we can only find communion when we are with Christ. It is not found in the money lenders in the world's temples, or in the false promises of the Shamashes all around us. Those buyers and sellers in the temple were not great sinners. But, they had lost sight of God as the Almighty at the centre of all things. In the Spirit, God calls us to prayer and sacrifice that our communion may deepen.

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