

<sup>12</sup> The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup> Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup> Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. <sup>15</sup> On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, <sup>16</sup> and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. <sup>17</sup> And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: " 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations' ? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.' "" <sup>18</sup> The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

<sup>19</sup> When evening came, they went out of the city.

<sup>20</sup> In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.

When approaching Jerusalem on the Jericho road you climb the eastern face of the Mount of Olives and pass through Bethany to the east of Jerusalem. As you crest the mount, you are greeted with a magnificent view of the Temple mount and Jerusalem. In Jesus' day the Temple, the representation of the Garden and God's presence, would have been the most prominent object in sight. It would also have been the logical place to look for the fruit of the kingdom. In a prophetic enacted parable, Jesus expresses his desire and expectation of fruit, as well as his disappointment at the lack of fruit, by using the fig tree. The tree looked good, but it was fruitless. In fact, none of those around Jesus even expected the tree to have any fruit!

The Temple represented Israel which had been blessed to be a blessing to the world. As God's people they were to display God's glory and attract all people to God. The fruit of the kingdom was to be the harvest of the converted souls. Yet, as the business of the Temple had become focused on the ritual of the insiders at the exclusion of those on the outside, Israel had not only become fruitless, but also lost all expectation of being fruitful. In that they were robbing God of his rightful fruit, so the Temple had become *a den of robbers*. With the Temple business offices being set up in the Court of the Gentiles, it was no longer *a house of prayer for all nations*. It was fruitless.

Throughout Scripture the consequences of fruitlessness is worthlessness and death. The fig tree of the parable and the Temple in 70 A.D. share the same fate. The fact that the timing was different in each case should serve to remind us that the Church as the kingdom outpost in the world today needs to regain its focus on being fruitful or face a similar end. Pray that as a member of the Body of Christ, you will discern and be equipped to play your role in keeping the church fruitful.

**Father, save me from the presumption of assuming that my kingdom work is done once I proclaim Jesus as my Lord. To have a Lord is to be under his authority and to do his will, which is to bear fruit for your kingdom. Make me fruitful in my conversations, my relationships, my business dealings and my service to my neighbors. Amen.**