

The LORD Is There

Session 4. The Glory Walks Out

The glory left the temple in slow, grieving steps, and God promised to be a sanctuary himself to the very people everyone said he had abandoned.

What We Found

Ezekiel was carried in vision from Babylon to Jerusalem and shown four scenes inside the temple, each worse than the last and ending in the most sacred courtyard of all: an idol at the gate, elders burning incense in a hidden room, women mourning a foreign god, and men between the porch and the altar with their backs to the temple, worshiping the sun. In the dark room the elders told themselves, 'The LORD does not see us.' He saw everything.

Before any judgment fell, God sent a man in linen to put a mark on the forehead of everyone who sighed and groaned over the sin of the city. The qualification was not perfection; it was grief. Before judgment began, the man in linen passed through the city and marked them, and we found that Revelation echoes this marking: God's seal on the foreheads of his servants, and at the very end his name written there (Revelation 7:3; 22:4).

Then we watched the unthinkable. The glory of the LORD left the temple, but not all at once: it withdrew in stages, pausing at the threshold and again at the east gate, and finally stood still on the mountain east of the city. We identified that mountain, and we found that centuries later Jesus stood on that same ridge, looked at Jerusalem, and wept.

And buried inside the departure we found the promise the whole night was hiding. To the exiles everyone had written off, God said that he himself had been a sanctuary to them in the lands where they were scattered. Distance from the temple was not distance from God. He had moved with them, and he had moved first.

Voices of the Church

St. Jerome, d. 420

Commenting on the mark of chapter 9, Jerome reports that in the ancient Hebrew script the last letter of the alphabet, taw, was written in the shape of a cross, and he reads the marking of the mourners' foreheads as a figure of the sign of the cross that Christians trace on their own foreheads: the ones set apart for mercy carry, centuries in advance, the shape of Calvary.

Commentary on Ezekiel, on Ezekiel 9:4. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Every time you sign your forehead at the Gospel, you are standing in Ezekiel 9 among the marked.

St. Augustine, d. 430

You were more inward than my most inward part, and higher than my highest.

Confessions III.6.11.

For the group. The exiles learned what Augustine learned in his own wandering: the God they thought they had left behind in a building was nearer to them than their own hearts.

St. Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274

St. Thomas teaches that God is in all things, and intimately, by his essence, presence, and power, because he gives and sustains their very being at every moment; but beyond this common presence there is a special one. In those who know and love him, God is present by grace, and he does not merely visit them but dwells in them as in a temple.

Summa Theologiae I, q. 8, a. 3, with q. 43, a. 3. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel 11:16 is the Old Testament seed of that second presence: God does not just accompany the exiles into Babylon, he begins to promise that he himself will be their sanctuary.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Make one visit this week to a church or adoration chapel outside of Mass. Sit near the tabernacle for ten minutes and read Ezekiel 11:16 there. Notice the lamp.
2. Each morning, trace the sign of the cross on your forehead, slowly, and remember whose mark it is and who qualified for it in Ezekiel 9: the ones who still grieve over sin.
3. Name one 'dark room' of your own, a habit or corner of life you run as if God does not see. Bring it into the light in prayer this week, and if it belongs there, bring it to confession.
4. Reach out once, concretely, to someone in exile: a text, a call, or a visit to someone far from home or far from the Church.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 11:16

"Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone."

Ezekiel 11:16

Ready Response

A friend going through the worst season of their life says: 'God is obviously done with me. Look where I am.' Using what we found tonight, what would you say?

Ezekiel saw the glory of God in Babylon before he ever saw it leave Jerusalem.

God's own words to people in exactly that place: I have been a sanctuary to them in the countries where they have gone.

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 586.** Jesus identifies himself with the Temple, God's definitive dwelling among men
- **CCC 1179.** New Covenant worship is not tied exclusively to one place
- **CCC 1197.** Christ is the true temple; Christians become temples of the Spirit
- **CCC 1296.** the seal on the forehead marks our total belonging to Christ

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 12-14 before we meet again.