

THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—I. Of the right use of the Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 April 2021

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] An homily of the right use of the church or temple of God, and of the reverence due unto the same. Where there appeareth that these days great slackness and negligence of a great sort of people in resorting to the church, there to serve God their heavenly Father according to their most bounden duty, as also much uncomely and unreverent behaviour of many persons in the same, when they be there assembled, and thereby may just fear arise of the wrath of God and his dreadful plagues hanging over our heads for our grievous offence in this behalf, amongst other many and great sins which we daily and hourly commit before the Lord.

Therefore, for the discharge of all our consciences, and the avoiding of the common peril and plague hanging over us, let us consider what may be said out of God's holy book concerning this matter.

Whereunto, I pray you, give good audience, for that it is of great weight, and concerneth you all. Although the eternal and incomprehensible majesty of God, the Lord of heaven and earth, whose seat is heaven and the earth his footstool, cannot be enclosed in temples or houses made with man's hand, as in dwelling places able to receive or contain his majesty, according as is evidently declared of the prophet Essay, and by the doctrine of St. Stephen and St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, and where King Solomon, who builded unto the Lord the most glorious temple that ever was made, saith, Who shall be able to build a meet or worthy house for him?

If heaven and the heaven above all heavens cannot contain him, how much less can that which I have builded? And further confesseth, What am I, that I should be able to build thee an house, O Lord?

But yet, for this purpose only, it is made that thou mayest regard the prayer of thy servant, and his humble supplication. Much less, then, be our churches meet dwelling places to receive the incomprehensible majesty of God.

[1 : 53] And indeed the chief and special temples of God, wherein he hath greatest pleasure, and most delighteth to dwell and continue in, are the bodies and minds of true Christians, and the chosen people of God, according to the doctrine of the Holy Scripture, declared in the first epistle to the Corinthians.

Know ye not, saith St. Paul, that ye be the temple of God, and that the Holy Spirit of God doth dwell in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which ye are.

And again in the same epistle, Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost dwelling in you, whom ye have given you of God? And that ye be not your own, for ye be dearly bought.

Glorify ye now therefore God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. And therefore, as our Saviour Christ teacheth in the Gospel of St. John, they that worship God the Father in spirit and truth, in what place soever they do it, worship him aright.

For such worshippers doth God the Father look for, for God is a spirit, and those which worship him must worship him in spirit and truth, saith our Saviour Christ.

[3 : 04] Yet all this notwithstanding, the material church or temple is a place appointed, as well by the usage and continual examples expressed in the Old Testament as in the New, for the people of God to resort together unto, there to hear God's holy word, to call upon his holy name, to give him thanks for his innumerable and unspeakable benefits bestowed upon us, and duly and truly to celebrate his holy sacraments, in the unfeigned doing and accomplishing of the which standeth that true and right worshipping of God aforementioned.

And the same church or temple is by the scriptures, both of the Old Testament and the New, called the house and temple of the Lord, for the peculiar service there done to his majesty by his people, and for the effectuous presence of his heavenly grace, wherewith he, by his said holy word, endureth his people so there assembled.

And to the said house or temple of God, at times by common order appointed, are all people that be godly indeed, bound with all diligence to resort, unless by sickness or other most urgent causes they be letted therefro.

And all the same, so resorting thither, ought with all quietness and reverence there to behave themselves in doing their bounden duty and service to almighty God in the congregation of his saints, all which things are evident to be proved by God's holy word, as hereafter shall plainly appear.

And first of all I will declare by the scriptures that it is called, as it is indeed, the house of God and temple of the Lord. He that sweareth by the temple, saith our Saviour Christ, sweareth by it, and him that dwelleth therein, meaning God the Father, which he also expresseth plainly in the gospel of St. John, saying, Do not make the house of my father the house of merchandise.

[4 : 50] And in the book of the Psalms, the prophet David saith, I will enter into thine house, I will worship in thy holy temple in thy fear. And it is in almost infinite places of the scripture, especially in the prophets and book of Psalms, called the house of God, or the house of the Lord.

Sometime it is named the tabernacle of the Lord, and sometime the sanctuary, that is to say, the holy house or place of the Lord. And it is likewise called the house of prayer, as Solomon, who builded the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, doth oft call it the house of the Lord, in the which the Lord's name should be called upon.

An essay in the 56th chapter, My house shall be called the house of prayer amongst all nations, which text our Saviour Christ allegeth in the New Testament, as doth appear in three of the evangelists.

And in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican which went to pray, in which parable our Saviour Christ saith, they went up into the temple to pray. And Anna, the holy widow and prophetess, served the Lord in fasting and prayer, in the temple night and day.

And in the story of the Acts, it is mentioned, how that Peter and John went up into the temple at the hour of prayer. And St. Paul, praying in the temple at Jerusalem, was wrapped in spirit, and did see Jesus speaking unto him.

[6 : 08] And as in all convenient places, prayer may be used of the godly privately, so it is most certain that the church or temple is the due and appointed place for common and public prayer, now that it is likewise the place of thanksgiving unto the Lord for his innumerable and unspeakable benefits bestowed upon us, appeareth notably in the latter end of the Gospel of St. Luke and the beginning of the story of the Acts, where it is written that the apostles and disciples, after the ascension of the Lord, continued with one accord daily in the temple, always praising and blessing God.

And it is likewise declared in the first epistle to the Corinthians, that the church is the due place appointed for the reverent use of the sacraments. It remaineth now to be declared, that the church or temple is the place where the lively word of God, and not man's inventions, ought to be read and taught, and that the people are bound thither with all diligence to resort, and this proof likewise to be made by the scriptures, as hereafter shall appear.

In the story of the Acts of the Apostles, we read that Paul and Barnabas preached the word in the temples of the Jews at Solomon, and when they came to Antiochia, they entered on the Sabbath day into the synagogue or church, and sat down.

And after the lesson or reading of the law and the prophets, the ruler of the temple sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if any of you have any exhortation to make unto the people, say it.

And so Paul, standing up and making silence with his hands, said, Ye men that be Israelites, and ye that fear God, give ear, and so forth, preaching to them a sermon out of the scriptures, as there at large appeareth.

[7 : 46] And in the same story of the Acts, the 17th chapter, is testified how Paul preached Christ out of the scriptures at Thessalonica. And in the 15th chapter, James the Apostle, in that holy council and assembly of his fellow apostles, saith, Moses of old time hath in every city certain that preach him in the synagogues or temples, where he is read every Sabbath day.

By these places you may see the usage of reading of the scriptures of the Old Testament among the Jews in their synagogues every Sabbath day, and sermons usually made upon the same. How much more then is it convenient that the scriptures of God, and especially the gospel of our Saviour Christ, should be read and expounded to us, that be Christians in our churches, especially our Saviour Christ and his apostles allowing this most godly and necessary usage, and by their examples confirming the same.

It is written in the stories of the gospels, in diverse places, that Jesus went round about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. In which places is his great diligence in continual preaching and teaching of the people, most evidently set forth?

In Luke ye read how Jesus, according to his accustomed use, came into the temple, and how the book of Essay the Prophet was delivered him, how he read a text therein, and made a sermon upon the same.

And in the nineteenth is expressed how he taught daily in the temple, and it is thus written in the eighth of John, Jesus came again early in the morning into the temple, and all the people came unto him, and he sat down and taught them.

[9 : 19] And in the eighteenth of John, our Saviour testifieth before Pilate, that he spake openly unto the world, and that he always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, whither all the Jews resorted, and that secretly he spake nothing.

And in St. Luke, Jesus taught in the temple, and all the people came early in the morning unto him, that they might hear him in the temple. Here you see, as well the diligence of our Saviour in teaching the word of God in the temple daily, and especially on the Sabbath days, as also the readiness of the people resorting all together, and that early in the morning, into the temple to hear him.

The same example of diligence in preaching the word of God in the temple shall you find in the apostles, and the people resorting unto them, Acts the fifth, how the apostles, although they had been whipped and scourged the day before, and by the high priests commanded that they should preach no more in the name of Jesus.

Yet the day following they entered early in the morning into the temple, and did not cease to teach and declare Jesus Christ. And in sundry other places of the story of the Acts ye shall find like diligence, both in the apostles in teaching, and in the people in coming to the temple to hear God's word.

And it is testified in the first of Luke that when Zachary the holy priest and father to John Baptist did sacrifice within the temple, all the people stood without a long time praying.

[10 : 40] Such was their zeal and fervency at that time. And in the second of Luke appeareth what great journeys men, women, yea, and children took to come to the temple on the feast day, there to serve the Lord.

And specially the example of Joseph, the blessed Virgin Mary, mother to our Saviour Christ, and of our Saviour Christ himself, being yet but a child, whose examples are worthy for us to follow.

So that if we would compare our negligence in resorting to the house of the Lord, there to serve him, to the diligence of the Jews in coming daily, very early, sometime great journeys to their temple, and when the multitude could not be received within the temple, the fervent zeal that they had, declared in standing long without and praying, we may justly in this comparison condemn our slothfulness and negligence, yea, plain contempt, in coming to the Lord's house, standing so near unto us, so seldom, and scarcely at noontime, so far is it from a great many of us to come early in the morning, or give attendance without, who disdain to come into the temple.

And yet we abhor the very name of the Jews, when we hear it, as of a most wicked and ungodly people. But it is to be feared, that in this point, we be far worse than the Jews, and that they shall rise at the day of judgment to our condemnation, who, in comparison to them, show such slackness and contempt in resorting to the house of the Lord, there to serve him, according as we are of duty most bound.

And besides this most horrible dread of God's just judgment in the great day, we shall not in this life escape his heavy hand and vengeance for this contempt of the house of the Lord, and his due service in the same, according as the Lord himself threateneth in the first chapter of his prophet Agius, after this sort.

[12 : 25] Because you have left my house desert, and without company, saith the Lord, and ye have made haste every man to his own house, for this cause are the heavens stayed over you, that they should give no dew, and the earth is forbidden that it shall bring forth his fruit.

And I have called drought upon the earth, and upon the mountains, and upon corn, and upon wine, and upon oil, and upon all things that the earth bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon beasts, and upon all things that men's hands labour for.

Behold, if we be such worldlings that we care not for the eternal judgments of God, which yet of all other are most dreadful and horrible, we shall not escape the punishment of God in this world by drought and famine, and the taking away of all worldly commodities, which we as worldlings seem only to regard and care for.

Whereas, on the contrary part, if we would amend this fault of negligence, slothfulness, and contempt of the house of the Lord, and his due service there, and with diligence resort thither together, to serve the Lord with one accord and consent in all holiness and righteousness before him, we have promises of benefits both heavenly and worldly.

Wheresoever two or three be gathered in my name, saith our Saviour Christ, there am I in the middle of them. And what can be more blessed than to have our Saviour Christ amongst us?

[13 : 46] Or what again can be more unhappy or mischievous than to drive our Saviour Christ from amongst us, and to leave a place for his and our most ancient and mortal enemy, the old dragon and serpent, Satan the devil, in the middle of us?

In the second of Luke, it is written, how that the mother of Christ and Joseph, when they had long sought Christ, whom they had lost, and could find him nowhere, that at the last they found him in the temple, sitting in the middle of the doctors.

So if we lack Jesus Christ, that is to say, the Saviour of our souls and bodies, we shall not find him in the marketplace or in the guild hall, much less in the alehouse or tavern amongst goodfellows, as they call them, so soon as we shall find him in the temple, the Lord's house, amongst the teachers and preachers of his word, where indeed he is to be found.

And as concerning worldly commodities, we have a sure promise of our Saviour Christ, seek ye first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall withal be given unto you.

And thus we have in the first part of this homily declared by God's word, that the temple or church is the house of the Lord, for that the service of the Lord, as teaching and hearing of his holy word, calling upon his holy name, giving thanks to him for his great and innumerable benefits, and due ministering of his sacraments, is there used.

[15 : 07] And it is likewise declared already by the scriptures, how all godly and Christian men and women ought at times appointed with diligence to resort unto the house of the Lord, there to serve him and to glorify him, as he is most worthy and we most bound, to whom be all glory and honour, world without end.

Amen. It was declared in the first part of this homily by God's word, that the temple or church is the house of the Lord, for that the service of the Lord, as teaching and hearing of his holy word, calling upon his holy name, giving thanks to him for his great and innumerable benefits, and due ministering of his sacraments, is there used.

And it is likewise already declared by the scriptures, how all godly and Christian men and women ought, at times appointed, with diligence to resort unto the house of the Lord, there to serve him and to glorify him, as he is most worthy and we most bounden.

Now it remaineth, in this second part of the homily concerning the right use of the temple of God, to be likewise declared by God's word, with what quietness, silence and reverence those that resort to the house of the Lord ought there to use and behave themselves.

It may teach us sufficiently how well it doth become us Christian men reverently to use the church and holy house of our prayers, by considering in how great reverence and veneration the Jews and the old law had their temple, which appeareth by sundry places, whereof I will note unto you certain.

[16 : 37] In the 26th of Matthew, it was laid to our Saviour Christ's charge before a temporal judge, as a matter worthy death, by the two false witnesses, that he had said he could destroy the temple of God and in three days build it again, not doubting but if they might make men to believe that he had said anything against the honour and majesty of the temple, he should seem to all men most worthy of death.

And in the 21st of the Acts, when the Jews found Paul in the temple, they laid hands upon him, crying, Ye men Israelites, help! This is that man who teacheth all men everywhere against the people and the law and against this place.

Besides that, he hath brought the Gentiles into the temple and hath profaned this holy place. Behold how they took it for a like offence to speak against the temple of God as to speak against the law of God, and how they judged it convenient that none but godly persons and the true worshippers of God should enter into the temple of God.

And the same fault is laid to Paul's charge by Tertullus, an eloquent man, and by the Jews in the 24th of the Acts, before a temporal judge, as a matter worthy death, that he went about to pollute the temple of God.

And in the 27th of Matthew, when the chief priests had received again the pieces of silver at Judas' hand, they said, It is not lawful to put them into Corban, which was the treasure house of the temple, because it is the price of blood, so that they could not abide that not only any unclean person, but also any other dead thing that was judged unclean, should once come into the temple, or any place thereto belonging.

[18 : 13] And to this end is St. Paul's saying in the second epistle to the Corinthians, the sixth chapter, to be applied. What fellowship is there betwixt righteousness and unrighteousness?

Or what communion between light and darkness? Or what concord between Christ and Belial? Or what part can the faithful have with the unfaithful? Or what agreement can there be between the temple of God and images?

Which sentence, although it be chiefly referred to the temple of the mind of the godly, yet seeing that the similitude and pith of the argument is taken from the material temple, it enforceth that no ungodliness, specially of images or idols, may be suffered in the temple of God, which is the place of worshipping God, and therefore can no more be suffered to stand there than light can agree with darkness or Christ with Belial.

For that the true worshipping of God and the worshipping of images are most contrary, and the setting of them up in the place of worshipping may give great occasion to the worshipping of them. But to return to the reverence that the Jews had to their temple, you will say they honoured it superstitiously, and a great deal too much, crying out, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, being notwithstanding most wicked in life, and be therefore most justly reprov'd of Jeremiah the prophet of the Lord.

Truth it is that they were superstitiously given to the honouring of their temple. But I would we were not as far too short from the due reverence of the Lord's house as they overshot themselves therein.

[19 : 42] And if the prophet justly reprehended them, hearken also what the Lord requireth at our hands, that we may know whether we be blameworthy or no. It is written in Ecclesiastes, the fourth chapter, When thou dost enter into the house of God, saith he, take heed to thy feet, draw near that thou mayest hear, for obedience is much more worth than the sacrifice of fools, which know not what evil they do.

Speak nothing rashly there, neither let thine heart be swift to utter words before God, for God is in heaven, and thou art upon the earth, therefore let thy words be few.

Note, well beloved, what quietness in gesture and behaviour, what silence in talk and words, is required in the house of God, for so he calleth it. See whether they take heed to their feet, as they be here warned, which never cease from uncomely walking and jetting up and down and overthrowing the church, showing an evident signification of notable contempt, both of God and all good men there present, and what heed they take to their tongues and speech, which do not only speak words swiftly and rashly before the Lord, which they be here forbidden, but also oftentimes speak filthily, covetously, and ungodly, talking of matters scarce honest or fit for the alehouse or tavern in the house of the Lord, little considering that they speak before God, who dwelleth in heaven, as is here declared, when they are but vermin here creeping upon the earth in comparison to his eternal majesty, and lest regarding that they must give an account at the great day of every idle word, wheresoever it be spoken, much more of filthy, unclean, or wicked words spoken in the Lord's house, to the great dishonour of his majesty, and offence of all that hear them.

And indeed, concerning the people and multitude, the temple is prepared for them to be hearers rather than speakers, considering that as well the word of God is there read or taught, whereunto they are bound to give diligent ear with all reverence and silence, as also that common prayer and thanksgiving are rehearsed and said by the public minister in the name of the people and the whole multitude present, whereunto they giving their ready audience should assent and should say, Amen, as St. Paul teacheth in the first epistle to the Corinthians, and in another place, glorifying God with one spirit and mouth, which cannot be when every man and woman, in severate pretense of devotion, prayeth privately, when asking another giving thanks, another reading doctrine, and forceth not to hear the common prayer of the minister.

And peculiarly, what due reverence is to be used in the ministering of the sacraments in the temple, the same St. Paul teacheth in his epistle to the Corinthians, rebuking such as did unreverently use themselves in that behalf.

[22 : 32] Have ye not houses to eat and drink in? saith he. Do ye despise the church or congregation of God? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I praise you not.

And God requireth not only this outward reverence of behaviour and silence in his house, but all inward reverence in cleansing of the thoughts of our hearts, threatening by his prophet Osse in the ninth chapter, that for the malice of the inventions and devices of the people, he will cast them out of his house, whereby is also signified the eternal casting of them out of his heavenly house and kingdom, which is most horrible.

And therefore, in the 19th of Leviticus, God saith, Fear you with reverence, my sanctuary, for I am the Lord. And according to the same, the prophet David saith, I will enter into thine house, I will worship in thy holy temple in thy fear, showing what inward reverence and humbleness of mind the godly men ought to have in the house of the Lord.

And to allege somewhat concerning this matter out of the New Testament, in which honour God would have his house or temple kept, and that by the example of our Saviour Christ, whose authority ought of good reason, with all true Christians to be of most weight and estimation.

It is written of all the four evangelists, as a notable act, and worthy to be testified by many holy witnesses, how that our Saviour Jesus Christ, that merciful and mild Lord, compared for his meekness to a sheep suffering with silence his fleece to be torn from him, and to a lamb led without resistance to the slaughter, which gave his body to them that did smite him, answered not him that reviled, nor turned away his face from them that did reproach him and spit upon him, and according to his own example gave precepts of mildness and sufferance to his disciples.

[24 : 18] Yet, when he seeth the temple and holy house of his heavenly Father misordered, polluted, and profaned, useth great severity and sharpness, overturneth the tables of the exchangers, subverteth the seats of them that sold doves, maketh a whip of cords, and scourgeth out those wicked abusers and profaners of the temple of God, saying, My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.

And in the second of John, Do not ye make the house of my Father the house of merchandise, for as it is the house of God when God's service is duly done in it, so when we wickedly abuse it with wicked talk or covetous bargaining, we make it a den of thieves or house of merchandise.

Yea, and such reverence would Christ should be showed therein, that he would not suffer any vessel to be carried through the temple. And whereas our Saviour Christ, as is before mentioned out of St. Luke, could be found nowhere when he was sought, but only in the temple amongst the doctors, and now again exercitheth his authority and jurisdiction, not in castles and princely palaces among his soldiers, but in the temple, ye may hereby understand in what place his spiritual kingdom, which he denieth to be of this world, is soonest to be found and best to be known of all places in this world.

And according to this example of our Saviour Christ, in the primitive church, which was most holy and godly, and in the which due discipline with severity was used against the wicked, open offenders were not suffered once to enter into the house of the Lord, nor admitted to common prayer and the use of the holy sacraments with other true Christians, until they had done open penance before the whole church.

And this was practiced not only upon mean persons, but also upon the rich, noble, and mighty persons, yea, upon Theodosius, that purecent and mighty emperor, whom, for committing a grievous and willful murder, St. Ambrose, Bishop of Mullane, reprov'd sharply, and did also excommunicate the said emperor, and brought him to open penance.

[26 : 20] And they that were so justly exempted and banished, as it were, from the house of the Lord, were taken, as they be indeed, for men divided and separated from Christ's church, and in most dangerous estate, yea, as St. Paul saith, even given unto Satan the devil for a time.

And their company was shunned and avoided of all godly men and women, until such time as they by repentance and public penance were reconciled. Such was the honour of the Lord's house and men's hearts, and outward reverence also at that time, and so horrible a thing was it to be shut out of the church and house of the Lord in those days, when religion was most pure, and nothing so corrupt as it hath been of late days.

And yet we willingly either, by absenting ourselves from the house of the Lord, do, as it were, excommunicate ourselves from the church and fellowship of the saints of God, or else coming thither, by uncomely and unreverent behaviour there, by hasty, rash, yea, unclean and wicked thoughts and words before the Lord our God, horribly dishonour his holy house, the church of God, and his holy name and majesty, to the great danger of our souls, yea, and certain damnation also, if we do not speedily and earnestly repent us of this wickedness.

Thus ye have heard, dearly beloved, out of God's word, what reverence is due to the holy house of the Lord, how all godly persons ought with diligence at times appointed thither to repair, how they ought to behave themselves there with reverence and dread before the Lord, what plagues and punishments, as well temporal as eternal, the Lord in his holy word threateneth, as well to such as neglect to come to his holy house, as also to such who, coming thither, do unreverently by gesture or talk there behave themselves.

Wherefore, if we desire to have seasonable weather and thereby to enjoy the good fruits of the earth, if we will avoid drought and barrenness, thirst and hunger, which are plagues threatened upon such as make haste to go to their own houses, to ale houses and taverns, and leave the house of the Lord empty and desolate, if we are poor to be scourged, not with whips made of cords out of the material temple only, as our Saviour Christ served the defilers of the house of God in Jerusalem, but also to be beaten and driven out of the eternal temple and house of the Lord, which is his heavenly kingdom, with the iron rod of everlasting damnation, and cast into outward darkness, whereas weeping and gnashing of teeth, if we fear, dread, and abhor this, I say, as we have most just cause so to do, then let us amend this our negligence and contempt in coming to the house of the Lord, this our unreverent behaviour in the house of the Lord, and resorting thither diligently together, let us there, with reverent hearing of the Lord's holy word, calling on the Lord's holy name, giving of hearty thanks unto the Lord for his manifold and inestimable benefits daily and hourly bestowed upon us, celebrating also reverently of the Lord's holy sacraments, serve the Lord in his holy house, as becometh the servants of the Lord, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

[29 : 28] And then we shall be assured, after this life, to rest in his holy hill and to dwell in his tabernacle, there to praise and magnify his holy name in the congregation of his saints, in the holy house of his eternal kingdom of heaven, which he hath purchased for us by the death and shedding of the precious blood of his Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one immortal majesty of God, be all honour, glory, praise and thanksgiving, world without end.

Amen. Amen. ■!■!