



Catechism Commentary 15

It may come as a surprise to know, because it is counter intuitive, that the first part of the Gospels to be written were the accounts of the saving passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The rest of the gospels, especially the infancy narratives were written to account for Jesus' origin and the events in his public ministry which led to his death and glorious resurrection. That raises an important question, why exactly was Jesus condemned to death? The *CCC* says that there were three reasons why Jesus was condemned to death by the Roman at the request of the Jewish authorities,

- Firstly, because they said he had acted against the law, e.g. when he cured people on the Sabbath.
- Secondly, because he was accused of being opposed to the temple in Jerusalem, and
- Thirdly, because they believed that he did not subscribe to belief faith in the one God because he proclaimed himself to be the Son of God.

None of these accusations was accurate or true. For example, He made it unmistakably clear that he had not come to destroy the law or the prophets (the Old Testament) but to fulfil them. The law still stood for him. The prophecies had to be fulfilled and the same was true for the law. In Mt 5:17–18 Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

As for his attitude to the temple, it is clear that he revered the Temple as the primary place of worship in the Jewish religion. It was the largest religious building in the world. It is thought that it could accommodate hundreds of thousands of people. The here were two main sections to the Herodian temple. There was the outer court of the Gentiles where non-Jewish visitors were allowed to enter. Then there were inner courts, which could only be entered by Jewish people, one for women, another for men. Then beyond those courts was the altar of animal sacrifice, and then most important of all, the temple sanctuary, the holy of holies, which only the high priest could enter. It was the place where heaven touched earth. It was zeal for God's house that led to Jesus' anger against those who were money changers, and animal sellers within the precincts of the temple. He felt that what they were doing was not only deeply disrespectful, it also involved dishonest exploitation, especially of poor people, and was a source of distraction for the Gentiles who came to pray in the temple.

It is possible that Jesus was not pleased by the fact that the Gentiles were not welcome in the inner courts of the temple, as they seemed to have been in the temple of Solomon. In Is 56:7 we read, "Even them (Gentiles) I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt Offerings and their sacrifices *Will be* accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." It is interesting to note that speaking about the Gentiles Eph 2:14 says of the risen Jesus, "he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility," i.e., the wall in the temple that separated the Jews from Gentiles. That said, Jesus often visited the temple and preached there. He wept over it because he knew in a prophetic way that like the city of Jerusalem, it was facing disaster because it was no longer fulfilling its God given purpose. It would be replaced by the temple of Jesus' body and afterwards the temple of the people of God.

It is not hard to understand why the Jews were offended by what Jesus said about God. The OT had said in Deut 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." When Jesus said that he was able to forgive people's sins he implied that he was God, because only God can forgive sins (cf. Mk 2:7). To Jewish ears that was not only blasphemous it seemed to imply that there were many Gods. Of course, as Son of God with a divine nature, Jesus was able to forgive sin. But as he said, there we are not more than one God, he and his Father were one (cf. Jn 10:30-38).