Good morning. Today is Passion Week. Monday. On this day that week, Jesus returned to Jerusalem. But this time, there was no fanfare, nor the crowds crying out Hosanna.

Matthew 21:18 early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, " May you never bear fruit again." Immediately, the tree withered. The next day, Jesus would explain his actions.

In Luke's gospel, chapter 19, he records something heartwarming that happened that morning. Verse 41. As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, if you even you had only known on this day what would bring you peace. But now it is hidden from your eyes. So, though he would be nailed to a cross, become a sin offering, and in that be separated from God the Father, he still wasn't weeping for himself; he was weeping for them.

He knew the sin in their hearts. He knew what they would do to him, the guilt that would be theirs, and the judgment that would come upon them. You see, in AD 66, the Jews would begin a rebellion against Rome, and Rome would send soldiers to deal with them. The fighting would culminate in what Jesus predicted. Luke 19:43 the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side.

They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you. Well, sadly, in 70 A.D. that is what happened. The great city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed, just as Jesus prophesied the Messiah had come to them, but they rejected and killed him. So as the judge, God did not spare the nation from the consequences of their sin.

It is the harrowing reality that God is not only a God of love and mercy, but also a God who is holy and just. He will not leave the guilty unpunished. Now, back in Matthew 21, we read of an incident that is perhaps one of the most remembered, yet misunderstood, actions of

the week. Jesus cleansing his temple. Matthew 21:12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there.

He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. Why? To make a statement that would be remembered, he says. It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer. But you are making it a den of robbers.

In essence, my house will not be identified as a Place of thievery. It will be identified as a place of prayer to God. So today, let's make that our takeaway. Be prayerful. Say that with me.

Be prayerful. The Jewish leaders had turned the temple area into a kind of marketplace. You see, those who didn't bring animals could purchase them there. So, the religious leaders devised a money exchange system that required worshipers to purchase the animals with temple money. But when they made the exchange, they overcharged them for the animals.

It was a burden on the people, especially the poor. No wonder Jesus was angry and took such drastic measures. His love and compassion for the people motivated him to rebuke the religious leaders for their greed and abuse. After that rebuke, Jesus continued to minister.

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did and the children crying out in the temple, Hosanna to the son of David, they were indignant. And they said to him, " Do you hear what they are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "yes. Have you never read out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies, you have prepared praise."

And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany, lodged there. Sundown comes, Monday concludes, and for us, it's our reminder. Be prayerful. Pray without ceasing. Pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

With this in mind, always keep praying. So, as we conclude this first devotion of the week, let's bow our hearts in prayer.

And so, Lord, we pause this Passion Week Monday to remember what you did and to understand what we can learn. Teach us, we pray. And in particular, teach us to be prayerful throughout this day. May our hearts stay inclined to you.

Thank you for hearing our prayers. Now you continue. God bless you.