

Dominus Flevit

In Latin, Dominus Flevit means "The Lord wept". The piece of real estate called Dominus Flevit is located on the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem. We were there last June 14. This is the traditional site where Jesus stopped before entering Jerusalem for His "triumphal entry" on Palm Sunday. The scene can be found in Luke 19:37-44. One of the newest churches in Jerusalem is built on the traditional site memorializing this event. The small sanctuary was built in 1955 by Antonio Barluzzi for the Franciscan order of monks. The church faces the Old City of Jerusalem, and memorializes when Jesus became overwhelmed with emotion as He approached Jerusalem because He was aware of its future doom. He was not fooled by the wonderful reception that He received, but knew that the crowds would turn on Him and reject Him.

Jesus predicted the consequences for the city, "For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." Sure enough, about 40 years later this came true. In 66AD, the Jews revolted against Rome, so Titus, son of the Emperor Vespasian, was sent with several legions to crush the rebellion. Roman soldiers laid siege to Jerusalem, and in 70 AD they were able to enter the city and burn it. It is estimated that 600,000 Jews were killed. The Roman army looted and burned the Temple, and then even pried up the stones of the Temple just as Jesus had predicted. This is why the Dominus Flevit Church was built in the shape of a teardrop.

The Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives is named for the olive groves on its slopes. It is a mountain ridge just east of the Old City of Jerusalem with three peaks. The highest peak rises to about 2700 feet. At the bottom of the mountain is the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus and His disciples stopped to pray on that fateful night that He was arrested. About halfway down the mountain is the traditional site for Dominus Flevit.

Today, visitors are amazed to see a giant graveyard on the Mount of Olives. There are an estimated 150,000 graves on its slopes. According to the prophet Zechariah, the dead will be resurrected on the Mount of Olives in the days of the coming of the Messiah. Christians also believe that Jesus will return to the Mt. of Olives at the second coming. Therefore, Jews have wanted to be buried there from biblical times until today as well.

The Mount of Olives is rich with biblical history. In 2 Samuel 15:30, David retreated from Absalom over the Mount of Olives. The road to Bethany goes over the Mount of Olives.

Bethany is on the eastern slope of the mount. This is where Jesus stayed with Mary and Martha whenever He came to Jerusalem. During the Passion Week, Jesus would spend the night in Bethany, then walk over to Jerusalem every day to enter and teach in the Temple. At the end of the day, Jesus would depart the eastern gate and walk up on the Mount of Olives with His disciples. He would stop there and pray and teach His disciples every day. On Tuesday evening He taught the Olivet Discourse when He once again predicted the siege and demise of the city. After His resurrection, He took the disciples out onto the Mount of Olives for His ascension into Heaven. As they watched Him be “lifted up”, two angels appeared to them, and said Jesus would one day come back to that same spot (the second coming).

Luke 19:28-47

We know from John’s account that Jesus was expected in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration because of the awesome miracle recorded in John 11 of the raising of Lazarus. Many of the Jewish leaders had been in Bethany when Jesus raised him up after he had been dead for four days. They returned to Jerusalem with the report so the whole area was buzzing with the news and on the lookout for Jesus. Jesus had come to many Passover celebrations, but this time it would be different. He knew this was His last week before the crucifixion, and the city was in high expectation of His arrival as the King they long expected. Matthew’s account was concerned with the fulfillment of O.T. prophecy so he quoted from Zechariah about the Messiah’s entry down the Mount of Olives on the back of a donkey’s colt, “Shout O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; Humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt” (Zech.9:9). Jesus sent His disciples to fetch the colt, and told them exactly where it would be and what they should say to its owners. These details not only fulfill prophecy, but make it clear that Jesus was in control of the situation. Jesus mounted the donkey, and rode it down the Mount of Olives. As He reached the descent, the crowds had formed, and were praising God and saying “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord”. This upset the Pharisees who said to Jesus, “Rebuke your disciples.” The Pharisees did not accept Jesus as the King of Israel, and feared the reaction of the crowd might cause an uprising against Rome. The Chief Priest, Caiaphas had said as much in John 11:50. They ruled under the authority of Rome, and had profited personally in a large way so they were not interested in upsetting their “license to steal”. Nevertheless Jesus replied that it must be said according to prophecy.

Contrast the Crowds Reception with Jesus’ Reaction to Jerusalem

It was at this point on the Mt.of Olives that the events memorialized as Dominus Flevit occurred. Imagine the great contrast between the actors in this great drama. The crowd is

welcoming Jesus as a conquering king who will liberate them politically and militarily, the religious leaders reject Him and want to kill Him, and Jesus knowing that the city as a whole will crucify Him begins weeping in sympathy for the city. Imagine the great joy and singing from the crowd, but the man on the donkey was weeping at the site of the city. Jerusalem means “city of peace”, but the city of peace was blind to the Prince of Peace. Jesus went on to explain His weeping, “For the days will come...when your enemies will level you...because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.” In His omniscience He knew that later in the week, the crowds would turn against Him and He would be crucified. He also knew the doom of the city that would occur in 70 AD as a consequence, and Jesus wept over the city.

\ The Love of God

I would like to suggest a new name for Dominus Flevit Church on the Mount of Olives—The Love of God Church. Can you even imagine weeping for people that you knew were going to kill you and persecute all your friends and family? Jesus had true compassion and love for His enemies in spite of all they did to Him. In the very beginning of His ministry He preached the Sermon on the Mount where He said, “You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor, but I say to you, love your enemies also.’” This was revolutionary at the time, but Jesus is the best example of this command. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Jesus had just explained to Nic that he needed to be born again to see the kingdom of God. Nic was baffled by this statement, but what Jesus was telling was that all people need to be born spiritually as well as physically. Because of sin, no one deserves eternal life, nor can they achieve it on their own, but God loves all people so He has provided the means by which they can be born spiritually and enjoy eternity in His glory in Heaven. The problem is that a gift is not a gift until it is received and accepted. Like the leaders of Jerusalem, most people are not interested in the gift of God which is the atoning work of Christ on the cross. This is why Jesus was weeping at Dominus Flevit.

The Olivet Discourse

Dominus Flevit occurred on Sunday of the Passion Week, but Tuesday evening as the sun was going down, Jesus wept again over Jerusalem from roughly the same spot on the Mount of Olives. Jesus had been in the Temple debating the Pharisees, and it became very clear that the religious leaders had rejected Him, and were plotting to kill Him. The consequences of their rejecting Him were made painfully clear in Matt.23:33 when Jesus said, “how will you escape the sentence of hell?” After this confrontation Jesus left the city out of an eastern gate, and walked across the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. Jesus stopped and

looked down into the city that was dominated by the size and splendor of the Temple Mount and said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who God sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks, and you were unwilling." In spite of their treatment of Jesus, He truly loved the people of Jerusalem; in spite of the fact Jesus knew He was going to be falsely accused, arrested, and crucified there, He truly loved them.

Once again Jesus repeated the prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD which happened just as He predicted (Matt.23:38-24:2). His disciples had been marveling at the awesomeness of the Temple so these statements blew their mind and provoked questions about future events. Jesus' reply in Matt. 24 is called the Olivet Discourse, and He made it clear that God was not through with Jerusalem. God has a great plan for the Jews and for that city, and Jesus promised to come back to that city. Naturally they asked when, but the one clear sign of Christ's return will be His unmistakable appearance in the clouds in great glory that will be seen by all people (Matt.24:30). Believers never have to wonder, when Jesus returns we will know beyond a doubt because it will be evident to all. Praise God for His love, and may all receive His free gift. CHARLIE TAYLOR