

MALACHI

The Man: The prophet's name is unknown – “Malachi” is derived from the Hebrew “my messenger” (3:1). He appears to be a patriotic Jew who holds staunchly to traditional ways and is most critical of mixed marriages and the conduct of the priests.

The Times: The content puts the prophet after the rebuilding of the Temple (515 B.C.) and before the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah started (i.e., before 445 B.C.), perhaps in response to these oracles. Jewish men were divorcing their wives and marrying foreigners; the wealthy were cheating the poor and selling them into slavery; the priests gave false instruction to the people and offered sick animals as sacrifices.

The Message: The prophet seeks to restore the holiness of marriage and promotes a Messianism focused on proper Temple offerings.

Prophetic Themes in Malachi

Authority: “The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. I have loved you, says the Lord; ...thus says the Lord of hosts ...” [1:1-2,4,ff]

Covenant Relationship: The priests have voided the covenant of Levi and the people have violated the covenant of their fathers: [2:4-8,10] “Surely I, the Lord, do not change, nor do you cease to be sons of Jacob. Since the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them”: [3:6-7]

Specific Sins: the priests offer blind, lame and sick animals as sacrifice; they give false instruction to the people; men divorce their wives for others: [1:6-14; 2:8-16]

Call to Repentance: The priests will be cursed if they do not give glory to the Lord: [2:2] The people must return to the Lord and offer proper sacrifices: [3:7-10]

Day of the Lord = Salvation: The Lord's messenger will purify like a refiner; evildoers will suffer, but the Lord will have compassion on those who fear him: [3:1-5,17-24]

Readings at Mass

1:14-2:2,8-10 – The Lord has cursed those who turned aside from the covenant and caused others to do likewise. [Year A, 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time]

3:19-20 – The day of the Lord will bring fire for evildoers, but healing justice for the righteous. [Year C, 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time]

3:13-20 – The day of the Lord will be fire for the wicked, but a healing sun of justice for those who fear the Lord. [Year I, Thursday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time]

3:1-4,23-24 – I am sending my messenger before you, like the refiner's fire. [Dec. 23; Feb. 2 (Feast of the Presentation)]