

3rd Sunday of Lent, Year B

GOSPEL

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Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money-changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

(John 2:13-25)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The only coins acceptable in the temple were half shekels. Roman coins were not acceptable because they were imprinted with the image of the emperor, and the Commandments clearly state that there should be no graven images used by Jews. The money-changers were actually performing a necessary task for the proper functioning of the religious life of Israel. What may Jesus really have been angry about?
- The trade in animals was necessary for sacrifice at the temple. Ordinary people needed to sacrifice for a number of religious reasons—for example, to become ritually clean again after childbirth (See Luke 2:22-25). But this trade was under a monopoly of the wealthy and elite Sadducees who controlled the temple cult. What may Jesus really have been angry about?
- Herod the Great (37-4 BCE) began a massive rebuilding of the temple in the hope of winning favour with the Jewish people, who saw him as a usurper of the throne (he was not even Jewish, yet was 'King of the Jews') and a Roman lackey. It took many years to complete.

EXPLORING THE WORD

In John's Gospel, hostility exists between Jesus and the Jews from the very beginning of his public ministry. This is probably a reflection of the situation in which John's community finds itself: that of being excluded from the practice of Judaism after Christians had been ousted from synagogue worship. We should not, therefore, read this text as a criticism by Jesus of Judaism generally.

If we read this text only as an example of Jesus' righteous anger over the greed of those who controlled commerce in the temple precinct, we miss much of the point that John is making. The Jews believed that the offering of sacrifice to God in the temple was a central part of their religious observance. Jesus now brings that practice to an end. He speaks of his own body as the new temple, the new centre of worship. Effectively, Jesus is reinterpreting the religious traditions of the Jews to centre in himself. He becomes the physical embodiment of 'my Father's house'. He is the living temple of the Father's presence among us.

- In what ways does the Church represent 'the sanctuary of his body' to the world today?
- How does the Church 'embody' Christ and act to bring about the reign of God?
- How does Jesus help us to understand God more fully and to worship God differently?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What are the abuses we should be angry about today?
- What are some ways we can respond to those abuses?
- Express some 'righteous anger' this week about something that disorders our world—for example, inequality, human rights abuse, exclusion. How are Christians called to respond to these injustices?
- Exchange stories of times when you may have become enraged over an injustice. How did you manifest that anger? What actions did you take to right that disorder? What are some appropriate responses to that which disorders our world today?
- This week's psalm response offers great wisdom:

Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.

Use it often this week.

