

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 3:16

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.



Gospel John 2:13-25; L29B

Since the Passover of the Jews was near,
 Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
 He found in the temple area those who sold
 oxen, sheep, and doves,
 as well as the money changers seated there.
 He made a whip out of cords
 and drove them all out of the temple
 area, with the sheep and oxen,
 and spilled the coins of the money
 changers
 and overturned their tables,
 and to those who sold doves he said,
 "Take these out of here,
 and stop making my Father's house a
 marketplace."

His disciples recalled the words of Scripture,
Zeal for your house will consume me.

At this the Jews answered and said to him,
 "What sign can you show us for doing this?"

Jesus answered and said to them,
 "Destroy this temple and in three days I
 will raise it up."

The Jews said,
 "This temple has been under construction
 for forty-six years,
 and you will raise it up in three days?"

Continued in Appendix A, p. 269.

*Year A readings may be used, see Appendix A,
 pp. 269–271.*

Reflecting on the Gospel

Today we depart from the Gospel of Mark and enter into the Gospel of John. The story of Jesus driving out the money changers happens during Holy Week in the Synoptic Gospels, but early in Jesus' ministry in John's gospel. In fact, we are in chapter 2, and Jesus is already in Jerusalem. Rather than a ministry in Galilee followed by a momentous journey to Jerusalem as we have the story in the Synoptic gospels, here in John's gospel Jesus goes back and forth to Jerusalem throughout his ministry.

At the time of Jesus, the temple had become in some senses a place of commodification. Oxen, sheep, and doves were sold to be sacrificed. It wasn't enough for one to bring one's own animals. They had to pass an inspection, and were "pre-certified," so to speak, guaranteed to be without blemish and therefore worthy of sacrifice. Of course, there might have been a markup for this quality assurance. For a nice price you could buy a worthy sacrifice. How quickly and easily does religion seem to fall into a trap of commodification? Similar things have happened in our own church history—the selling of indulgences comes to mind.

The challenge of commodification of religion is not limited to Jesus' day, or the annals of church history. Commodification of God's grace happens today too. The unholy alliance of money and the access to religion that it buys were scandalous then, and should be scandalous today. Jesus responds to this scandal as the Scriptures foretold (Ps 69:9). He is zealous, passionate for his Father's house, which has been turned into a bazaar.

Those with the vested interest in the status quo are upset. But Jesus replies with his parabolic riddle-speech. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Of course, he is referring to the temple of his own body. But the stakeholders do not see the deeper meaning of his speech. They see only literal realities and they know that the temple took nearly half a century to build. To them, Jesus must have seemed a wild-eyed zealot, off his rocker and half-baked. He was dangerous, a threat to business and religious interests, and would have to be stopped.

But for Jesus, the temple is holy, not worthy of profanation, neither the Father's house nor Jesus' own self. The example Jesus gives us today demands consideration. We must recoil at every instance of commodified religion, or a selling of God's grace. God's presence is not to be bartered; it is not a commodity. God's grace is freely given to all.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The gospel tells us something today that we often overlook. The temple is not only a physical place in Jerusalem, but metaphorically it is Jesus' very self. By extension, the human body is a place of God's presence. To be holy is not merely to go to the physical temple to purchase a "pre-certified and quality assured" sacrifice. If the human being is a dwelling place of God, then true worship becomes how we treat ourselves, and how we treat the other. But treating another kindly, patiently, and with love is much more difficult to commodify. It seems easier to say, "buy this" and all will be well with you and God. But God's grace is not dependent on somebody else, what they sell us, in deed or in word. Rather, our relationship with God is dependent upon how we treat the other, who is a dwelling place of God in our midst. It can be difficult to die to our preconceived notions of God, to let go of the idea of an accountant God who take stock of each and every sacrifice, ensuring it is without blemish. Instead, Jesus invites us to a relationship with God based on Jesus himself, the enfleshment of God. If Jesus is the incarnation of God, if humanity is a dwelling place for the divinity, then proper worship becomes how we treat our neighbor.

Focusing the Gospel

John 2:13-25

The temple is the focus of today's gospel. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke place Jesus' cleansing of the temple immediately after his Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem, John places the event early in his gospel, following Jesus' first sign at Cana. The Synoptic Gospels recount only one climactic journey to Jerusalem, but the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel makes several trips to the holy city.

Pilgrims to the temple were expected to make a donation for its upkeep. Because Roman currency was considered "unclean," Jewish visitors had to change their money into Jewish currency in order to make their temple gift. Money changers, whose tables lined the outer courts of the temple, charged exorbitant fees. Visitors who wished to have a sacrifice offered on the temple altar would sometimes have to pay fifteen to twenty times the market rate for animals purchased inside the temple. Vendors could count on the cooperation of the official temple "inspectors" who, as a matter of course, would reject as "unclean" or "imperfect" animals brought in from outside.

Jesus' angry toppling of the vendors' booths and tables is a condemnation of the injustice and exploitation of the faithful in the name of God. So empty and meaningless has their worship become that God will establish a new "temple" in the resurrected body of the Christ.

Of course, the leaders and people do not appreciate the deeper meaning of Jesus' words, just as those who witnessed any of his miracles understand the true nature of his messianic mission. As the writer of the Fourth Gospel observes, only after Jesus' resurrection will they understand that Jesus was speaking of the sanctuary of his own body.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

How can anger be channeled into a positive emotion?

Have you ever struggled to "drive out" of your life some attitude, situation, or set of circumstances that deadened you to the real joy and purpose of life?

In what ways does your parish realize Jesus' vision of "my Father's house" in today's gospel?

How is your community a sign of Christ crucified?

Focusing the First Reading

Exod 20:1-17

The Israelites' encounter with God during their exodus experience transformed them from a nomadic tribe into a nation. On Mount Sinai, God gives to Moses his "law": the ethical and moral principles that will form them as God's people, a nation of justice and mercy and light for all nations. The "law" here is seen not merely as a series of proscriptions but as a treaty whereby God enters into covenant, as the protector of his servant Israel.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11 (John 6:68c)

The wisdom of God's law is praised in this short poem. For the law of God is not a restriction but the source of wisdom that empowers and liberates its adherents to live lives of meaning and purpose. The text is Peter's reply to Jesus at the conclusion of John 6. After Jesus calls "Bread of Life," many abandon him but Peter steadfastly remains, his faith in Jesus' words as the source of "everlasting life."

Focusing the Second Reading

1 Cor 1:22-25

For the Jews, who expect signs, and for the Greeks, who see a crucified Messiah makes no sense. A crucified King is both folly and contradiction. But Paul argues to the Christians at Corinth that the failure manifests power and what looks foolish is truly wisdom. The failure of the cross reflects the wisdom of God who upends the world's expectations: humility and service reveal true power and authority.

Third Sunday of Lent, March 4, 2018

Gospel (cont.)

John 2:13-25; L29B

But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.

While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name

when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.