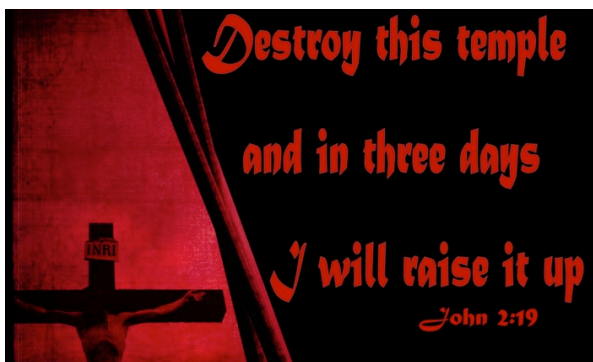


LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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John 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

John 2:23 When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This passage is important historically and theologically. The Temple Action (to give it a neutral title — it is more than a "cleansing" —) was one of the two events that moved the religious authorities in Jerusalem to act against Jesus. Combined with the messianic entry, the Temple Action constituted a threat both religious and political. As a result, scholars usually affirm the historicity of the event, even though it is reported differently in John and in the Synoptic Gospels. It is also important theologically. The moralising tradition usually assumes some kind of abuse or sharp practice in the Temple. But the provision of animals and a currency exchange service were both required for the ordinary functioning of the Temple. Attacking the sellers was attacking the Temple as such and this was well understood by the authorities. Jesus' action critiqued the Temple as the unique point of access to God. He had already implied this in his ministry and teaching: the kingdom of God is among you.

There is a question regarding the timing of the incident. In the other Gospels, it happens during Jesus' only visit to Jerusalem. In John, where there are many visits to Jerusalem (historically probable), the incident takes place at the very start (historically improbable).

KIND OF WRITING

Our passage belongs to a familiar type of writing from the Bible, that of "prophetic action." From time to time, prophetic figures dramatised their teaching by an action.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. We all tend to confine God to received traditions (places, images, words) but we know that "God is greater than our conscience." (1 John 3:20) How do I experience that "more" of God and keep it before my eyes?
2. Jesus himself is the "locus" of God's presence for us, a presence found in life, through others, in the Word of God and in the sacraments. What have been my own moments of encounter, with him who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction?

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA—www.tarsus.ie

What sacred places have we turned into market places today? Our economic systems are driven by profit at the expense of our environment and at the expense of the world's poorest people. Mother Earth cries out to us to stop making this household a marketplace.

"May the Lord bless us with anger at injustice May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor." (Franciscan blessing)

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper

For the next three Sundays the gospel will be taken from John and will set before us the way in which the fourth evangelist understands the mystery of the cross and resurrection. Of all the evangelists, John relies most heavily on symbolism to communicate the meaning of Easter and what it reveals to us about God and the story today is no exception. On the face of it what Jesus did in cleansing the temple was a rejection of corrupt practices in the temple that distracted from true worship of God. But here is more at stake in his dramatic gesture and this becomes apparent as Jesus responds to the authorities that oppose him. As the Word made flesh he is the true temple or dwelling place of God and in him we will come to abide in God's love, which is what true worship is all about.

The true temple of God is no longer to be found in some far away place but is within, as Jesus has made us all temples of the Holy Spirit and in the process challenges us to know God not through mere ritual observance but 'in spirit and in truth'.

SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand. Year B

Scripture reflection

Scripture reflection

Lord, there are so many temples that people are turning into market places today:

- children are a sacred trust, but we project our own ambitions and our hurts on them;
- our relationship with our spouse we turn into a battlefield where we make sure to occupy the higher ground;
- we enter into friendships to get advantages for ourselves;
- the land we see as a source of easy profit;
- the human body we treat as an object of competitions;
- a church community becomes a place for prestige and power.

We thank you for the times you sent Jesus into those temples;

he made a whip out of some cord and drove us out,

scattering our coins and knocking our counting tables over.

We were angry, hurt and confused,

but looking back we now recognise that it was zeal for your house which devoured you.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels. Year B

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. In the Old Testament the privileged place of God's presence was the Temple in Jerusalem. In the New Covenant, this was replaced by the person of Jesus. This is the symbolism of the action of Jesus in the Temple. Recall how Jesus has helped your relationship with God and give thanks for this.
2. But we are the Body of Christ. When have you been particularly aware of the sacredness of people (yourself or others).
3. There are many ways in which people, the temples of God, are being profaned today. Where are you aware of the sacredness of the human person being violated? Who are the people seeking to cleanse the temple, by promoting respect for the dignity of every human person? Perhaps in ways you have done this.
4. We may also think of institutions as in some way temples of God's presence. In this time when aspects of our institutions are crumbling we can perhaps identify with the Jews who were horrified at the suggestion that the Temple would be destroyed. What is it like for you living in a time when some of the things you have taken for granted are collapsing? Where do you find hope in such circumstances?

JOHN BYRNE OSA—Intercom

The four evangelists recount this story, but the John adds a dialogue with the Jews. Do not forget that John wrote his gospel twenty or thirty years after the temple had been destroyed. Many Jews felt orphaned. The temple was at the heart of their religion. How could they survive without the presence of God in the midst of the people?

The evangelist reminds the followers of Jesus that they do not need to feel nostalgia for the old temple. Jesus is the new temple, destroyed by the religious authorities but resurrected by the Father. It is not simply a bold metaphor, but a reality that must mark the relationships of Christians with God.

It changes everything for those who see the new temple in Jesus, in whom God lives. It is not enough to enter a church to meet God. You need to be with Jesus to join his project, to follow his footsteps, to live in his spirit. To worship God in this new temple it is not enough to burn incense, sing songs of praise, or conduct solemn liturgies. Those who truly worship God are those who live in the sight of God "in spirit and in truth". True worship lies in living in the spirit of Jesus, and by the truth of the gospel, without which all *cultus* is empty worship.

The doors of this new temple, which is Jesus, are open to all. No one is excluded. Sinners, the unclean, and even pagans can enter it. The God who lives in Jesus belongs to all and is for all.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year B