

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

*Gospel: John 2:13-25*

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 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. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six Years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.

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

### REFLECTION 1: DIVINE JEALOUSY

The image of the Temple filled with crowds, moneychangers, animals and birds for sacrifice was an assault on the senses. The sight of cages and holding pens, the sound of bleating, fluttering of wings and shouting voices, the smells, the smoke. It was also the place where the clink of Roman coins, priestly corruption and caste divisions was a mockery of all that the Temple stood for. In today's Gospel Jesus was enraged to find the sacred Temple reduced to a market place for sacrificial animals. Jesus was filled with zeal for justice and true worship. He could take it no more. He approaches the sellers and the moneylenders. He tripped over their tables spilling coins everywhere. Wielding his whip of cords he drives them out of the Temple area (John 2:13-25).

At the height of Israel's political success and religious fervour, the Temple of Solomon served the community well. However after the Babylonian conquest, much of that Temple had to be renovated. Dedicated again around 515 BC, this Temple underwent extensive renovation begun by Herod around 63-64 AD. So, at the time Jesus performed his actions, described in today's Gospel, the Temple was still in the process of being restored. Revisiting the first reading from the book of Exodus, God has just issued his commandments and proclaims that he is a jealous God. Jealousy is a powerful passion and Jesus cannot tolerate a compromise with hypocrisy and corruption and the respect due to his Father's House, 'zeal for his Father's House will consume him'. So, how do we reconcile this angry Jesus with his peaceful message of forgiveness and love?

In the second reading from First Corinthians, Paul tells us that Jesus is both the power and wisdom of God, which often appears to us to be foolishness. Perhaps Jesus' action in the Temple could be regarded as part of that 'foolishness'. Jesus knows how to cleanse us of our sins without destroying the essence of who we are. Just as we might rebuke a child for its own good, so Jesus rebukes us. After cleaning the temple, our interior self is renewed, we are once again on holy ground. Jesus is the true Temple and will rise again on the third day. As Titus the Roman general laid siege and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD not leaving 'a stone upon a stone', Jesus' body, his Mystical Body, replaced the Temple of old, gathering together the scattered children of God throughout the universe. Through our baptism in Christ we too have become God's Temple, his spirit dwelling within us. We need Lent each year to, as it were, renovate, to spring clean God's Temple in our spiritual lives, to realign the values of the Gospel that so often contrast with those of our world today. John in his Gospel

remarks about Jesus. He said that 'Jesus did not need anyone to testify about human nature, he himself understood it well' (V. 25). It is with a sense of much confidence that we take the measure of ourselves these forty days. We may not always meet the challenge of our belonging to Christ but he who knows our hearts and our nature also knows our good attempts at wholeness along with our failures.

## **REFLECTION 2: THE FATHER'S HOUSE**

On the 3rd Sunday in Lent, the ancient authors set before the praying assembly two of the most important institutions in Jewish life, the law (Exodus) and the temple (John). By their faithful observance of the law Jews were sincerely surrendering themselves to God's will, which they believed, was expressed in the law. By their reverence for the temple, its liturgy, its feasts and sacrificial system, the Jews were expressing their gratitude for the presence of God among them. But by the time of Jesus these laws were multiplied ad infinitum that it required an expert to interpret them for ordinary folk. The temple that was in its third reconstruction at the time of Jesus was a far cry from the Tent of Meeting in Israel's desert days. Josephus the Jewish historian at the time of Christ describes the temple 'The outward face of the temple was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at sunrise, it reflected a fiery splendour that forced those that looked on it to avert their eyes'.

Jesus went to the beautiful-to-behold temple that day and made a clear statement: 'Stop making my Father's house a market place'. He was not against the temple as such, Jesus objected to the desecration of the Holy Place by a marketplace mentality, one that took advantage of the poor. The care of the poor is not an afterthought. Pope Francis tells us that it is the primary responsibility of those who belong to Jesus.

When Jesus appeared in the temple area that day his words and his presence were transformative. Moneychangers and sellers with their animals had no place within the confines of the Father's House. But he also used that moment to speak of another temple, the temple of his body. 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up'. As one in whom the very presence of God dwelled, Jesus could readily call himself a temple. Earlier in his Gospel, the evangelist told readers that Jesus the Word of God became flesh and pitched his tent among us. In Jesus this God became present to us in flesh and blood, in time and space.

Jesus' words also remind each of us that we too are temples, holy places where God has chosen to take up residence. Just as the Jerusalem temple was cleansed of a market place mentality, so do we as living temples have to focus not on ourselves but on God and those God puts in our way to love and serve. That's why during each Lent everyone of us should make a real heart to heart confession with a priest, de-cluttering whatever is unwholesome in our lives through the power of Jesus' absolving word, 'Your sins are forgiven you, go in peace'.