

March 3, 2024
3rd Sunday of Lent
John 2:13-25

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 moneychangers 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 moneychangers 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?" 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.

Background

Matthew, Mark and Luke all place this event in the life of Jesus at the end of his life (Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, and Luke 19:45-46). It is what leads the religious leaders to the decision to have Jesus arrested and executed. In vivid contrast, John's Gospel places this account at the very beginning, in the second chapter. Also, in John's Gospel, Jesus goes to Jerusalem three different times (John 2:13, 5:1, and 12:12). Scripture scholars suggest that John places this incident at the beginning of the Gospel because he wants to make clear from the very beginning who Jesus is. John's Gospel was written decades after Jesus' death and resurrection. The Christian community was well aware of the events of Jesus' life and death. There was no need to gently lead into the radical nature of Jesus' life and death.

John's description of Jesus in the temple is also more violent than that of the synoptic Gospels. Only in John does Jesus make a whip, and include a prediction of the temple's eventual destruction. Zechariah may offer help to understand why John presents such a forceful image of Jesus in the temple. Zechariah describes a time when the fullness of God will be present: "And every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holy to the Lord of hosts; and all who come to sacrifice shall take them and cook in them. On that day there shall no longer be any merchant in the house of the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 14:21). This passage states that when the day of fulfillment comes, everything will be considered holy to God, and there will no longer be any need for merchants in the temple to sell unblemished animals for sacrifice. By his actions, Jesus is saying that the time of fulfillment has come, and the merchants' presence is no longer needed.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever been present when another became so angry that they expressed their anger physically? What was that like for you?
2. Can you list the number of times in just the last week you have read, heard of, or experienced expressions of anger or violence? How do such accounts affect you?
3. The Gospels do not record many occasions when Jesus became angry. Can you think of other times? Can you think of other times he used physical force? How does that awareness affect how you hear this Gospel text?

4. If you had come to the temple that day to offer your sacrifice and discovered Jesus overturning the tables, how do you think you would have reacted?
5. Can you take some time to reflect on who might feel that they are being told their offering, their life, is not suitable as an offering in the temple?
6. Can you talk to God now about how you feel about expressing anger, or times when you have felt so angry that it was expressed physically, or why you dislike thinking of Jesus or God as being angry?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclom.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the Readings for March 3, 2024, the Third Sunday of Lent

In those days, God delivered all these commandments: "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of slavery in Egypt. You shall not have other gods besides me. For I am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. "Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord, your God. "Honor your father and your mother. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor anything else that belongs to him."

Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul; his decree is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; his command is clear, enlightening the eye.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; his ordinances are true, all of them just.

They are more precious than a heap of purest gold; sweeter also than syrup or honey from the comb.

Brothers and sisters: Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

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 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?" 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, 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.

Excerpts from Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19:8-11; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; and John 2:13-25

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for March 3rd, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. On this third Sunday of Lent, we hear from John's Gospel about Jesus cleansing the temple of the money-changers and those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves. Jesus drives them all out, saying, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." When the religious leaders ask, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" he replies, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." He is speaking about the temple of his body.

The other readings also have references to proper adherence to the requirements of the Father, and their benefits, and the superiority by far of the Lord's ways over those of any who presume otherwise. In the first reading from Exodus, God (through Moses) delivers His commandments, and in a statement that recalls his promise to Abraham last week, he will "bestow mercy down to the thousandth generation on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments." Psalm 19 praises the law of the Lord, in various verses referring to the decree, precepts, ordinances, and command of the Lord. They are perfect, trustworthy, right, true, just, and clear, "refreshing the soul" and "giving wisdom to the simple." In the second reading, from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified. The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."

As John's Gospel is arranged, the first chapter includes the prologue, a middle section about John the Baptist, and then the welcoming of the first disciples. The second chapter has two events: the wedding at Cana, and then the cleansing of the temple that is the Gospel this Sunday. John has Jesus going to Jerusalem and cleansing the temple "only a few days" after the wedding at Cana, and that wedding is placed "on the third day" after the Baptist sees Jesus and reveals, "Behold, the Lamb of God. I saw the Spirit come and remain on him." Placed such as it is, this episode establishes early that after the resurrection, the significance of the temple is replaced by the person of Jesus. Also, placed after the Transfiguration as an early Lenten Sunday Gospel, this reminds us of the significance of the ultimate three days that come at the close of the Lenten season.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!