

3 Lent B SML 2021
JN 2:13-25

To quote the Holy Father Pius XII, "Although God is the author of scripture, human beings made their own genuine contributions."

When I was a priest at St. Joseph's Parish in Toms River, a few parishioners, a few of the Sisters and I went to a concert of a very fine contemporary Christian singer, Michael Card. The work of this composer, songwriter and singer enriched my spiritual life. Michael Card is truly one of God's musical instruments. However, Michael Card is a fundamentalist. Fundamentalists read the Bible word for word, black and white, and leave no room for interpretation. Catholics, on the other hand, and most mainline Christian Churches, interpret the meaning of sacred scripture. I mention this because the concert was held in a fundamentalist church.

Michael, as a Fundamentalist, attempted to glean an historical life sketch of Jesus using the Gospel, which scripture scholars assert was certainly not the intention of any of the four evangelists. In the middle of his concert, Michael gave a little homilette. He began by saying how much he loved John's gospel more than the other three because John's gospel is

much more theological than Matthew, Mark and Luke. And for the most part, his content was right on the mark, until he mentioned the Cleansing of the Temple. Michael addressed the fact that the synoptic gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke record that Jesus cleansed the temple at the very end of his ministry, just after he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, a few days before his passion. John, the different gospel, records the Cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus ministry in John, Chapter 2. Michael went on to say that some scripture scholars claim that John moved the Cleansing of the Temple to an earlier place in Jesus' ministry . . . which is precisely what John did. As a literary master, as were each of the four gospel writers, John was inspired by the Holy Spirit to move the Cleansing of the Temple to an earlier place in Jesus' ministry in order to make a very clear statement:

- ✓ that there is something wrong with the Temple,
- ✓ that Judaism is not the way to worship God,
- ✓ that Jesus, the way, the truth and the life,
- ✓ that Christianity, is the way to worship God.
- ✓ and to identify early on the person of Jesus as the Son of God.

So Michael said some believe John moved the Cleansing of the Temple to an earlier place in Jesus' ministry, to which Catholic and main line non-Catholic scripture scholars would agree. Then he said, "My response to that is, 'Duh.'" **"Duh!"**

Michael said the reason why John records the Cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and Matthew, Mark and Luke record the Cleansing at the end of Jesus' ministry is Jesus obviously cleansed the temple twice. And I said to one of the nuns, "I feel like standing up and saying, **"Duh yourself Michael!"** And Sister said, "Father, our habits and your collar makes us stick out like a sore thumb. We gotta be outnumbered about 1000 to one, so I suggest you just sit tight."

Jesus did not cleanse the temple twice. John moved the Cleansing to Chapter 2 as John's theology is very concerned with identifying the person of Jesus as the Son of God. Hence the reason for all of the Ego Eimi, all the I AM sayings in John's Gospel:

- ✓ I am the bread of life
- ✓ I am the light
- ✓ I am the good shepherd
- ✓ I am the vine
- ✓ etc.

This theology is consistent throughout John's gospel, and once you understand John, you love John so much more. As if Jesus' cleansing the Temple the first time didn't take? Michael Card is a fine musician, but he is not a theologian.

For those of us who are not theologians, some background on the Cleansing of the Temple:

The Passover was nearing and, as was Jewish custom, the pilgrims were making their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. As any of us were in awe as children, the first time we saw the Christmas Tree at Rockefeller Center, the Jewish child or adult was in awe of their temple as they approached. The Temple was truly a magnificent sight, particularly since Herod had almost completed rebuilding and adorning it. The Apostles themselves, on Mount Olivet, would be so struck by its glittering appearance as it shone in the morning, one of his disciples said to Jesus, "Look, Teacher, what stones, what a building!" (MK 13:1)

Naturally, it was a problem for anyone who came to offer sacrifice to get hold of the animals for sacrifice; then too, the animals had to be tested and judged according to the standards found in the Book of Leviticus. Accordingly, there was a flourishing trade of sacrificial animals of all degrees. Gradually,

the sellers of sheep and doves pushed their way closer and closer to the Temple, choking the avenues that led to it. Eventually, the sellers had the audacity to sell right in the Temple. Now the Jewish people, because they lived under the governance of Rome, had two money systems: Roman coins with Caesar's inscription, and their own money. The Jews could not use Roman coins in the Temple – hence the need for moneychangers, moneychangers, who exchanged coins at a profit.

Our Blessed Lord found himself in this dichotomous scene where prayers were mingled with the blasphemous bidding of the merchants, and where the clinking of money chimed in with the braying of cattle; he was angry. The Jewish leaders who said they were so devout, allowed temple profanation. It would be the same today if a leaders of government claim to be “devout” Catholics but promoted abortion at every turn. So out of some cords probably used as leashes for the cattle, he made his whip and drove out the cattle and the profiteers.

Notice those who were driven out of the Temple did not lay hands on Him, nor did they reprove Him as if He had done something wrong because they knew he was right. They merely asked for a sign of His authority which would justify His

actions. Even though Jesus had already told them they had profaned “His Father’s house,” he gave them a second sign.

“Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Now the people who heard these words never forgot them. At Jesus’ trial, they would bring these words up again, in a slightly distorted form, for they said:

We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another not made with hands.”

Yet not even so did their testimony agree, because they distorted what He said.

They remembered His words again as He hung on the Cross:

“And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, ‘Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from that cross!’”

These words haunted them after His death as they approached Pilate to take precautions in guarding His grave, for now they realized Jesus was referring not just to the Temple of stone, but the Temple of His body:

We remember how that imposter said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore order

the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away.”

In fact, the theme of the Temple was echoed again in the trial and martyrdom of St. Stephen, when the persecutors charged:

This man is forever saying things against the Temple and against the Law. (AA 6:13)

One last reason why we know John moved the Cleansing of the Temple to his second chapter. Up until now in John's Gospel, the only ministry Jesus had performed was His first miracle, changing the water into wine at the Wedding Feast in Cana. In John's Gospel, Jesus' coming to the Temple was His first appearance there. It is highly unlikely that a Man Who preached about peace 24 times in the gospel, who taught us to love our enemies, who taught us to turn the other cheek, yada yada yada, would use such forceful means as His opener to public ministry. No. Jesus used this forceful means to make His point at the end of His ministry, just a few days before He ascended Calvary. Why? Because Jesus had exhausted every peaceful alternative and Jesus was certain there was no other way to make the Jews understand,

- ✓ that there is something wrong with the Temple,

- ✓ that Judaism is not the way to worship God,
- ✓ that Jesus, the way, the truth and the life,
- ✓ that Christianity, is the way to worship God.
- ✓ and to identify early on the person of Jesus as the Son of God.