

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on March 19, 2006
Third Sunday of Lent
Liturgical Year B

In John's Gospel, Jesus makes three pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Today's Gospel of Jesus cleansing the temple in Jerusalem is the first one. On a later pilgrimage, He cures the crippled man at the Pool of Siloam. At the third, we hear of his triumphal entry, before his conviction, death, and Resurrection. In all three accounts, the Evangelist notes how people react. In this first scene, "many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing." The same is true the second time with the cure of the crippled man. And the same is true the third time, after the crowd heard that He had raised Lazarus from the dead.

The point is that, in all three instances, people believed in Him and they changed. St. Paul tells us that the Jews demand signs and the Greeks look for wisdom. Christ is both the sign and the wisdom. His sign is the cross, and His wisdom is selfless love. Both the sign and the wisdom are inherent in the temple of his body. "Templum" means a place marked out for soothsayers, a place to see and understand. The temple of Christ's body is a place to see the sign—the Cross—and a place to understand its meaning—the selfless love of God in Christ.

Several years ago, I came across a book about the Martyrs of the Atlas Mountains. This was a group of seven French Trappist monks of the Abbey of Our Lady of Atlas who were kidnapped and assassinated in 1996 during the Algerian Civil War. What moved me especially was the testament of the Prior, Dom Christian de Chergé. He wrote it two months before the kidnapping. In it, he expresses his faith in God, his acceptance of what might occur, his love for the Algerian people, and most poignantly, his forgiveness of the one who would strike him down. He concludes his testament saying, "And also you, my last-minute friend, who will not have known what you were doing. Yes, I want this THANK YOU and this GOODBYE to be a 'GOD BLESS' for you, too, because in God's face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both." Fr. Christian, the other six monks, and countless of others became part of the Temple of Christ's Body.

I look at Lent this year at age 51 and where I was at 41 and realize that this Lent is better than some, not as good as others. You may feel the same. Little by little, though, there is movement into the Temple of Christ's Body, to see and to understand the Cross and the selfless love of God in Christ. Today again, the Temple is present, the Cross is present, Selfless Love is present, in the Eucharist: this is My Body given for you...this is My Blood poured out for you...do this in memory of Me. In this Eucharist, we are called to love and forgiveness in this most valuable time of Lent.