

# Third Sunday of Lent

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 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.

Jn 2:13-25

Jesus expels the merchants from the temple. It is a very powerful scene: Jesus is angry; the animals are probably noisy and running around. Many artists have added coins scattered in disarray. Everybody is confused and terrified. What we see gives us a lot to think about. It seems like Jesus doesn't want people to conduct business inside the temple.

But then it gets complicated. After all, the animals and the money were there to protect the purity of the temple. Lambs and doves were there to make sure that the proper type of animals were used as a sacrifice, according to what one could afford. Money exchangers were there to convert Roman coins into the proper "temple money." Understanding all this makes me think that maybe the gravity of the whole event lies in a different place. The disciples recalled this Scripture passage: "Zeal for your house will consume me." Maybe Jesus wants to purify their practice – the way they behave in the temple – and tell them something more about it.

The Jews gathered in the temple seemed to understand it that way, so they asked a question: “What sign can you show us for doing this?” The answer they hear is profoundly shocking and makes things even more complicated: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Destroy the temple. Even the very sound of these words makes me shiver. How painful it must have been to the Jews standing there. What do you mean destroy the temple? The temple is the sign of the covenant. The temple is the place where we meet God. The temple is the gift that God gave us so that we can be close to Him, so that we can love Him. How can you destroy the temple? Why would you destroy the temple?

These words echo in the trial of Jesus. One of the major charges against him is that he wanted to destroy the temple. The people surrounding Jesus, and the authorities of Jerusalem, understood very well that an attack on the temple is an attack on their whole faith, their whole culture, and their very identity.

But Jesus means what he says: “In three days, I will raise it up.” The Jews don’t believe it, and the disciples are shocked. Therefore, John meticulously informs us: first that Jesus was talking about the temple of his body, and then that the apostles remembered these words after the resurrection and came to believe in Jesus.

Why was it so important? The apostles realized that every word Jesus said was true. Christ understood, more than anybody, that the temple was already in ruins, that the covenant it represented was shattered by human unfaithfulness, hypocrisy, stubbornness, and pride. He knew that the culture the temple embodied and the love it symbolized was ruined, not by God but by the people themselves.

What can Jesus do? He does what God always does. He gives himself as the temple of the new covenant. He is the new place of encounter. The new depth of love is revealed in the body of Christ. His complete gift of love establishes a covenant that will always remain valid and open. The covenant that will always be waiting for every human being to respond and to join.

In three days He will rebuild not only the lost relationship with humanity, but even humanity itself. Jesus will rebuild the temple of his body in you and me. He will sustain it by his presence; He will restore it by his mercy. He will protect your and my dignity, and he will never get tired of reminding me and you of this amazing gift.