

GOSPEL

JOHN 2:13-35

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's Gospel presents, in John's version, the episode in which Jesus drives the merchants out of the Temple of Jerusalem. He performs this act with the help of a whip of small cords, overturns the tables and says: "you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade". This decisive action, undertaken in proximity to Passover, makes a great impression on the crowd and sparks the hostility of the religious authorities and of those who feel their economic interests threatened. But how should we interpret it? It certainly was not a violent action, inasmuch as it did not provoke the intervention of the defenders of public order: the police. No! But it was interpreted as *an action typical of prophets*, who often denounced, in the

name of God, abuses and excesses. The issue raised was that of authority. In fact the Jews asked Jesus: "What sign have you to show us for doing this?", that is, what authority do you have to do these things? As if to demand that he show he was truly acting in the name of God.

To interpret Jesus' act of purifying the house of God, his disciples made use of a biblical text taken from Psalm 69[68]: "For zeal for thy house has consumed me" (v. 9); the Psalm says this: "For zeal for thy house has consumed be". This Psalm is a call for help in a situation of extreme peril due to the hatred of enemies: the situation that Jesus will experience in his Passion.

Zeal for the Father and for his house will lead him all the way to the Cross: his is the zeal of love which leads to self-sacrifice, not that false zeal that presumes to serve God through violence. Indeed the "sign" that Jesus will give as proof of his authority will be precisely his death and Resurrection: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". The Evangelist notes: "But he spoke of the temple of his body". With Jesus' Paschal Mystery begins the *new worship*, in the new temple, the worship of love, and the *new temple* is He himself.

Jesus' behaviour recounted in today's Gospel passage exhorts us to live our life not in search of our own advantage and interests, but *for the glory of God who is love*. We are called to always bear in mind those powerful words of Jesus: "you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade". It is very harmful when the Church goes astray with this manner of making the house of God a house of trade. These words help us to reject the danger of also making our soul, which is God's dwelling place, a house of trade, by living in constant search of our personal interests instead of generous and supportive love. This teaching of Jesus is always timely, not only for Church communities, but also for individuals, for civil communities and for society as a whole. Indeed, it is a common temptation to exploit good, sometimes dutiful deeds in order to cultivate private, if not entirely illicit interests. It is a grave danger, especially

when one exploits God himself and the worship owed to him, or service to mankind, His image. This is why Jesus used "a harsh approach" that time, in order to shake us from this mortal danger.

May the Virgin Mary support us in the effort to make Lent a good occasion to recognize God as the One Lord of our life, removing all forms of idolatry from our hearts and from our deeds.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Jesus was driven by zeal and passion for what was right and true in relation to God his Father. In what ways does your own faith make you burn with love and desire to change situations around you?
- In what ways might we be tempted to make use of our faith simply for personal benefit and gain (trade) rather than for pure and God centred reasons. See Pope Francis' reflections for some insight here. How have we as a parish fallen into a consumeristic mentality?
- A 'house of prayer' is one in which relationships are deepened and grown. How might you make your life and even body into a 'house of prayer' and 'temple of the Holy Spirit'?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.