

GOSPEL

John 2:13-25

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 BENEDICT XVI

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On this Third Sunday of Lent the Gospel — in St John's version — refers to the famous episode of Jesus who drives the animal dealers and the money-changers out of the Temple of Jerusalem (cf. Jn 2:13-25). The event, recorded by all the Evangelists, happened in the Passover Feast and made a deep impression on both the crowd and the disciples. How should we interpret Jesus' action?

First of all it should be noted that it did not provoke any repression from the keepers of public order because it was seen as a typical prophetic action: indeed, in God's name prophets often reported abuse and sometimes did so with symbolic gestures. The problem, if there was one, concerned their authority. For this reason the Jews asked Jesus: "What sign have

you to show us for doing this?" (Jn 2:18), show us that you are truly acting in God's name.

The expulsion of the dealers from the Temple has also been interpreted in a political and revolutionary sense, placing Jesus on a par with the zealots' movement. The zealots were, precisely, "zealous" for God's law and prepared to use violence to enforce respect for it. In Jesus' day they were awaiting a Messiah who would free Israel from Roman domination. But Jesus did not fulfil this expectation, so much so that some disciples abandoned him and Judas Iscariot even betrayed him.

In fact it is impossible to interpret Jesus as violent: violence is contrary to the Kingdom of God, it is a tool of the antichrist. Violence is never useful to humanity but dehumanizes it.

Let us, therefore, listen to the words that Jesus spoke while he was carrying out this action. "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade". And the disciples then remembered that in a Psalm is written: "zeal for your house has consumed me" (69[68]:10).

This Psalm is a call for help in a situation of extreme danger, because of the hatred of enemies: the plight that Jesus was to live through in his Passion. Zeal for the Father and for his house was to bring him to the cross: his was the zeal of love that pays in person, not the zeal that would like to serve God through violence.

In fact the "sign" that Jesus was to give as proof of his authority would be his very death and Resurrection. "Destroy this temple", he said, "and in three days I will raise it up". And St John recorded: "he spoke of the temple of his body" (Jn 2:20-21). With the Pasch of Jesus a new form of worship begins, the cult of love, and a new temple which is he himself, the Risen Christ, through whom every believer can worship God "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23).

Dear friends, the Holy Spirit began to build this new temple in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Let us pray through his intercession that every Christian may become a living stone of this spiritual building.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: We have many examples in history of holy men and women who sacrifice themselves for love of others. Who is someone in your life that demonstrates this to you?



Heart: Pope Benedict contrasts the zeal of love, which cause someone to sacrifice themselves as Jesus did, with the zeal that leads to violence. What injustice or wrong do you feel zeal about? Why? Is it a zeal of love?



Hands: Where do you find it most difficult to respond with love? What might you do differently this week to grow in love in that circumstance?

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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be.’