

“Zeal for my Father’s house has consumed me.” [Psalm 69:9]

A. EXODUS 20: 1-17-- The Context: This book covers events around 1440 to 1270 B.C. It was written to make sure Israel never forgot God’s saving act of delivering them from slavery in Egypt. God made Israel a nation and **the law is a sign of God’s love and presence.** [RG 47] **Today’s text iterates God’s giving Moses the Ten Commandments.** [TCB 83, 84]

B. PSALM 19:8-11 --The Context. The heavenly elements of the world, now beautifully arranged, bespeak the power and wisdom of our Creator. **His wisdom is available to humans in the law** toward which the psalmist prays to be open. [TCB, 658]

C. I CORINTHIANS 1:22-25---The Context: Paul wrote this around 56 A.D. to address abuses in the community and to answer practical questions posed by them. **In today’s portion** Paul had just rebuked the community for rivalries over who baptized them (Paul, Cephas or Apollos). He reminds them that **true wisdom and power are to be found paradoxically where one would least expect, in the place of their apparent negation, on the cross with Jesus.** [TCB, 254]

D. JOHN 2:13-25--The Context: This gospel was written by a disciple of the apostle John, the son of Zebedee between 90-100 A.D. to inspire faith. John portrays Jesus not as the suffering servant but as a peaceful, powerful, noble and divine figure who is the Son of God and the Word of God. [RG 364] **Today’s pericope** reports Jesus cleansing the Temple. **It indicates the post-resurrection replacement of the temple by the person of Jesus.** [TCB, 151]

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

The gospel presents a dramatic scene where Jesus shows himself as Lord of the Temple. It does not seem in character to see Jesus with a small whip of cords physically driving out the traders in cattle, sheep and pigeons - animals to be used in sacrifices. And the money changers were needed because only Jewish money could be offered in the Temple. Roman coins had the image of *Divus Augustus* (the ‘divine Augustus’) and so were regarded as idolatrous; they had to be exchanged for Jewish coinage.

Jesus objected not to the trade as such which was quite legitimate, but to its being done in the temple precincts, “my Father’s house”. “Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father’s house into a market.” **For Jews the temple was a sign of God’s presence. It was no longer conveying this message.** Such business should have been carried on just outside the temple precincts, but we know that in our own time hawkers try to get as close to the action as possible. It is also not at all impossible that the temple authorities connived at the practice and may have even benefited if the traders had to “rent” spaces in the Temple to do their business.

This would explain the priests’ anger at what Jesus was doing. “What’s going on here? What sign can you show to justify what you are doing?” Jesus replies: “Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.” They come back: “It has taken 46 years to build this temple and you can raise it in only three days?” This was indeed true and, in fact, the building had not yet been fully completed at this time.

But Jesus was speaking about another sanctuary, another temple where God lived - his own body. Through this event we are reminded during Lent of what we are preparing to remember and celebrate - the death and resurrection of Jesus. **It is the very heart of our faith.** But, as Paul explains, writing to the Christians of Corinth, Jesus’ death to the Jews was (and is?) a stumbling block, a scandal, an insurmountable obstacle. He died a criminal’s death. It was

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impossible for them to accept that the Messiah, their Savior and King, could suffer such an ignominious death at the hands not only of Israel's enemies but even more of his own people. That just could not be; God could not allow it.

To the Gentiles, the pagans, it was meaningless. Power and domination and influence were what counted in their world. The idea that someone executed like and with common criminals should be worshipped as Lord was nonsense, it was something to be ignored and laughed at and rubbished - as it still is by many in our own society today. But to those who have been called and who answer the call - be they Jews or Gentiles, men or women, slave or free - it is the power and wisdom of God. The death of Jesus to any objective observer seems like utter failure, to believe in such a Lord seems stupid but **those with the eyes of faith can see the power of love in that death.** [Frank Doyle, SJ]

There are **three reasons** why Jesus acted as he did and had anger in his heart. **(1) God's house was being desecrated.** In the Temple there was worship without reverence. **(2) Jesus wanted to show that the whole paraphernalia of animal sacrifice and ritual was completely irrelevant and could do nothing to lead men to God.** **(3) The conduct in the Court of Gentiles shut out the seeking Gentile from the presence of God.** The Temple authorities and Jewish traders were making the Court of the Gentiles into an uproar and rabble (i.e. lowing of cattle, bleating of sheep, cooing of doves, shouts of hucksters, rattle of coins, bargaining disputes) where no man could pray. [Note: The outer court of the temple was the Court of the Gentiles; then came the Court of the Women, the Court of the Israelites, and the Court of the Priests.]

It is clear that Jesus did expect that the Temple would pass away; that he had come to render its worship unnecessary and obsolete; and that, therefore, he would never suggest that he should rebuild it. **It is the presence of the living, risen Christ which makes the whole world into the Temple of God.** In the street, in our home, at business, on the hills, in church we have our inner temple, the presence of the Risen Christ forever with us throughout the world.

Is there anything in our church life—a snobbishness, an exclusiveness, a coldness, a lack of welcome, a tendency to make the congregation a closed club, an arrogance, a fastidiousness, a prejudice—which keeps the seeking stranger out? Let us remember the wrath of Jesus against those who made it difficult and even impossible for the seeking stranger to make contact with God. (Barclay, Gospel of John, 112-117)

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

This Lent how am I returning Jesus love for expiating my sins on the cruel cross?

During Lent how am I becoming a sign of God's presence in the people and in events in my life?

Do I love our church family so much that I reach out to welcome strangers on Sunday?

How am I cleansing my temple? Prayer? Fasting? Almsgiving? Acts of charity?

[Sources: Scripture readings- *The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB), and its Reading Guide (RG)*; *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, (NJBC) 1990 edition*; *Dictionary of the Bible (DB), J.L.McKenzie, SJ*; *Daily Study Bible Series, Gospel of John (DSBS), Wm Barclay*; *Sunday Scripture Reflections* by Frank Doyle, SJ at www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace.; [Compiled by: Michael Hosemann].