

REFLECTION

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Gospel John 2: 13-25

-The first weeks of Lent focused us on our relationship with the law as a people of the covenant and followers of Jesus. Here, we experience the power of God's voice in the giving of the law. To follow these precepts is to remain in right relationship with God and with each other. The language of the law is "you" and "me," an intimate address that reflects the direct connection between God, the nation, and each and every individual.

-Today we depart from the Gospel of Mark and enter into the Gospel of John. John's vivid depiction of the cleansing of the temple offers us insight into Jesus' outrage at the abuses in the Temple precinct. The money changers and those selling unblemished animals for sacrifice were gouging the traveler and the poor, who had no recourse but to purchase what they needed from extortionists. Jesus responds to this scandal as the Scriptures foretold (Ps 69:9). He is zealous, passionate for his Father's house, which has been turned into a bazaar. After Jesus expelled the money changers, the Jewish leaders asked him: "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this? Jesus answered, 'Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again.' 'Are you going to build it again in three days? They asked him. It has taken forty-six years to build ...! After describing this conversation, John says: "But the Temple Jesus was speaking about was his body. So, when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and what Jesus had said." In other words, even Jesus' disciples didn't fully understand what Jesus was talking about at the time. Only after he was raised to glory did it become clear.

In doing this, Jesus stands within the tradition of the prophets, who come to Israel to call her back to sanctity. The Talmud calls for the very sanctity that Jesus seeks. His bold disruption of commerce, and the revenue it provided to the less-than-scrupulous is experienced as very threatening, as is his comment that he can raise the Temple up in three days. Of course, he is referring to the temple of his own body. But the stakeholders do not see the deeper meaning of his speech. They see only the literal realities and they know that the temple took nearly half a century to build.

The season of Lent is a good time to rediscover the power and beauty of the four Gospels. It is a good time to listen to them at Mass with greater attention and deeper love. More importantly, Lent is a time to focus our eyes on Jesus, the central figure of the Gospels. It's a time to place all our trust in him. If we do this, he will show himself to us on Easter Sunday in an entirely new way, just as he did to his disciples.