

Gospel Reflection – Session #11

In Jewish tradition, the Temple marked the point of physical connection between God and humankind and between the past and the present. It was where God's story and humanity's story met. However, in the year 70 C.E.—some 40 years after Jesus—the Temple was destroyed by the Romans. The gospel of John is written another 20+ years later and so the reality of the Temple's destruction is still trying to be absorbed by the people. It was a very powerful image for the gospel writer to suggest that Jesus was the new Temple—the new point of connection.

The Temple in Jerusalem was (and still is) a powerful symbol of holiness and a symbol of the connection and relationship between God and the Hebrew people. It is often assumed that Jesus' anger was directed at the traders and moneychangers because their business had infringed on and desecrated the temple precinct. But the reality is a bit more complicated. The Temple was the holiest site for sacrifice to God. The tradition dictated that sacrifice made by a priest on the altar was the highest form of worship. The best animal to sacrifice was a healthy, properly formed creature. Rather than walking a lamb all the way from somewhere like Galilee to Jerusalem, the faithful would purchase their sacrifice animal at the Temple itself—thus the presence of the people selling cattle, sheep, and doves.

To further complicate matters, the Temple traders would not accept Roman coins to purchase the sacrificial animals as they bore the image of the deified emperor. Therefore, money changers were required to exchange Roman currency for acceptable coinage—so the money changers were also playing their part in the prayer life of the Temple. Jesus' outrage is not so much with the traders and the money-changers as with the whole religious practice and hierarchical structure that has developed to a point where the only way a person can pray in a 'valid' way is to purchase an animal and hand it over to a priest who goes behind a screened wall to sacrifice the animal. The only way to seek God's forgiveness and mercy was to 'buy' it at the Temple. This was what outraged Jesus. He could not stomach the injustice nor the barriers that had been erected between the people and their God.

Questions for Youth

- *What aspects of this gospel passage do you find confronting or challenging?*
- *What was Jesus' dream of the way people should be able to relate to God?*
- *Have you ever seen something that you knew to be unjust? What did you do?*
- *How can you work against injustice in your local community?*

Questions for Parents/Sponsors

- *What aspects of this gospel passage do you find confronting or challenging?*
- *What was Jesus' dream of the way people should be able to relate to God?*
- *What is so important about this story that it is included in all 4 Gospels?*
- *What does Jesus' extreme actions in the temple tell us about the importance of worship? Responding to injustice?*

Digging Deeper: *Are there Church practices today that may be seen as unjust or an impediment to worship?*

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Sunday Readings:

Reading #1: Exodus 20:1-17

Responsorial Psalm: 19:8-11

Reading #2: I Corinthians 1:22-25

Gospel: John 2:13-25

A full copy of the readings for the week can be found on the U.S. Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/030721-YearB.cfm>