

Third Sunday of Lent

Year B

Ex 20:1-17 or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17

Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11

I Cor 1:22-25

Jn 2:13-25

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The Gospel today describes an incident that occurred on the first feast of Passover in Jesus' public life. After the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus had spent a few days at Caphernaum with his mother and his disciples. Then, like the good Jews they were, they traveled the sixty or so miles to the holiest place in all the world ... the Temple in Jerusalem.

This holy building had been on the same spot for 1000 years. Originally built by Solomon, it had gone through two reincarnations. The temple that Jesus visited had been abuilding for 46 years under the direction of King Herod, and would take 20 more years to complete. It was already a magnificent edifice, but more, it was for the believing Jew the place of God in this world.

It was no wonder then that Jesus became angry when he saw that merchants (probably in collusion with the temple authorities) had begun to encroach on the sacred places. Granted a place at the entrance to perform their necessary services, the money-changers and the sellers of sacrificial animals had gradually crept closer and closer to the sanctuary ... with the result that even in the innermost court the worshipper could hear the wrangling of those doing business outside.

Jesus rushed among the buyers and sellers brandishing a whip of rope. All fled before him. For a few moments they saw in his face the anger of an infinite God against those who try to make a profit from divine service. His words were the terrible words God addresses to every human who soils their body and soul with sin: "How dare you desecrate the temple of God!"

The disciples were frightened and the temple officials were stunned. Finally coming to their senses, they asked Jesus for a proof of his authority. Jesus responded by making his first prediction of his passion: "Destroy this temple (he said) and in three days I will restore it!" The authorities took him literally, thinking he meant the temple that had

been under construction for 40 years, and they made fun of him. The disciples simply did not understand. It was only after the resurrection that they realized that Jesus had been speaking about his own resurrection.

The crowds flocked around Jesus, anxious for him to perform a miracle for them, but he knew better than to take their adulation seriously. They, in their own way were like the merchants . . . they wanted to make a profit from their religion. Jesus knew he could not trust himself to anyone who seeks God only for their own selfish reasons. He had given his first sign of what God is like . . . he is a God who takes human sin seriously and is angered by it.