

Related topics

For further study:

Ten commandments; moral life; conversion; worship/liturgy; Church; prayer; paschal mystery; Christology; disciplines of Lent; reconciliation

Closing Prayer

Holy God,
the folly of the cross
mocks our human wisdom,
and the weakness of the crucified
puts worldly power to shame.

Banish from our hearts
every pretence of might and of knowledge,
that by the power flowing from Christ's resurrection
your people may be raised up from the death of sin
and fashioned into a living temple of your glory.

Grant this through Christ, our liberator from sin,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
holy and mighty God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers. Lent 3, Year B²

CPL • LBC Year B Lent 3.odt • 2021-02-04

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

The Third Sunday of Lent

Principal Service readings

Exodus 20.1-17	The Ten Commandments
Psalm 19 [or 19.7-14]	The fear of the Lord is pure
1 Corinthians 1.18-25	God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom
John 2.13-22	Jesus expels the dealers from the temple

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus cleanses the temple

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!' ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' ¹⁹Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

John 2.13-22 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

An account of the purification of the temple is present in all three synoptic gospels (Mark 11.15-17; Matthew 21.12-13; Luke 19.45-46). John has used a unique account of the tradition and placed it near the beginning of his gospel. Whereas in the synoptic gospels Jesus enters Jerusalem towards the end of his ministry, in John's gospel Jesus goes there several times, from an early stage. We could ask why does John present it like this? The incident has been clearly shaped for its position. John provides an introduction (2.13), and a conclusion that serves as an introduction to the episode with Nicodemus (2.23-25), which follows in the next chapter.

The account itself opens with a description of Jesus' actions (2.14-17), highlighted by his words (2.16), followed by the reaction of the religious authorities ('the Jews', 2.18-20), and then a closing comment on the action from the narrator (2.21-22).

There is a strong concentration on the Jewish context of what is happening in the scene. The Jewish feast of the Passover is approaching, and this provides the motivation for Jesus' visit. After pausing at Capernaum, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the feast, which takes place on 14 and 15 of Nisan (March-April). Before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, this was a major event for the city of Jerusalem. The celebration of the Passover was a combination of earlier feasts linked with the Exodus from Egypt, and it became a continuing symbol of hope and redemption, and also a central religious experience for the people.

Jesus comes across merchants in the temple area selling oxen, sheep and pigeons, which were necessary for temple worship. They were also changing Roman money into Tyrian money so that the people could pay their temple tax without using coins containing effigies. These activities were not intrinsically wrong, but Jesus acts against them, using a whip of cords to drive out those selling animals, and overturning the tables of the money changers. To the people selling doves, who would have been kept in cages, and so couldn't be driven out, he said, 'Take these things out of here!' (2.16).

For Jesus, the temple is not to be treated like a marketplace, but it is also 'the house of my Father' (cf. Isaiah 56.7). In his actions, Jesus is

showing that, 'zeal for your house will consume me' (Psalm 69.10); this is remembered by the disciples.

For the first time in the story 'the Jews' become active protagonists. They demand that Jesus give them a 'sign' (*semeion*), a miraculous proof to guarantee belief. Jesus then responds with the ambiguous, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up' (2.19). The Jews think he is talking about a building, but he is referring to more than that. This is the 'word of Jesus', that the Jews take at the surface level, rather than the deeper meaning. They identify the temple with the building, showing their misunderstanding and that they have failed to believe the 'word of Jesus'.

The narrator offers a correct understanding of Jesus' words (2.21), and comments on the response of the disciples (2.22). He points out that there will be a deeper remembering when Jesus is raised from the dead.

Quotations

1

Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

John Wesley, 1703–1791

2

God has no need for our worship. It is we who need to show our gratitude for what we have received.

St Thomas Aquinas, 1225–1274

3

Freedom of speech is of no use to a man who has nothing to say and freedom of worship is of no use to a man who has lost his God.

speech, 2 November 1940, Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1882–1945