

## **John 2:13-22<sup>v vi</sup>**

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making 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. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After 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.

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### **<sup>v</sup> About the Gospel: John 2:13-22**

Today's reading recounts the cleansing of the temple and the questioning of Jesus' authority. Jesus gives an enacted parable similar to the prophetic deeds of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

In the temple courtyard, unblemished animals were sold for sacrifice, and pagan coins were exchanged for Jewish coinage to pay the temple tax. Jesus attacks not only the dishonesty of the temple trade but its very existence. The merchants had set up shop in the temple's outer courts, the only area open to Gentiles who came to pray and seek Israel's God.

Jesus' death and resurrection are the ultimate sign of his authority. As the water of the old covenant has been replaced with the wine of the new (2:1-11), so Jesus replaces the temple as the focus of worship.

### **<sup>vi</sup> Reflection and Response**

In today's gospel, Jesus personifies the title given him in 1 Corinthians: stumbling block. Perhaps we can appreciate his apparent folly if we transpose the scene to the modern site of Vatican City: Imagine a young man entering St. Peter's Square, ranting at the sellers of postcards and souvenirs. He overturns their pushcarts and stands, dumps their money, then proceeds inside the basilica. There, he slashes expensive altar cloths and luxurious vestments. He overturns golden chalices and splinters exquisitely carved monstrances. He shatters marble sculptures and destroys relics. The security guards who question his authority receive some obscure

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answer about the odd young man's ability to rebuild the elaborate edifice three days after its destruction. The whole scenario is so bizarre that police commit him to a mental institution. Needless to say, the religious establishment continues along its well-oiled grooves.

Jesus envisions an order so far beyond ours that the two cannot even stand in comparison. He is trying to shift the reverence that people feel for the temple where they worship to a different temple, his body. He attempts to move the focus of peoples' relationships with God away from the domes and spires of Jerusalem to the inner sanctums of their own hearts.

His action echoes God's liberation of the Jews. Just as they were once enslaved in Egypt, so in Jesus' day, they had become chained by the dictates of religious legalism. He calls the people to something better: a sense of the holy that surpasses one place, one culture, one set of customs. He envisions a sacred space wide enough to include all those who had been banned from the temple precincts. He invites them to reject empty religious formulas and discover new meaning, new life in himself. In place of a God who had become distant and dead to them, he reveals a God as close as their skin.

The only real wisdom we will ever find is in Christ, and what we discover in him may not look like our traditional concepts. By the same token, the sign of a crucified corpse may look as absurd to us as it did to the Jews. But if we enter into this irony, we too may find the power of God in weakness and the wisdom of God in folly.