

The life of God

# CRACKED WIDE OPEN

Diocesan Lent Course 2021

in the paschal mystery

The suffering, death, resurrection  
and glorification of Jesus

Diocese of Chichester Lent Course 2021

**Week Three**  
**Bible Notes**

# John 2:13-22



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

22 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.

## Notes for Bible Study

The cleansing of the Temple by Jesus is recorded in all four gospels though St. John places it in a different position to that given it by Matthew, Mark and Luke (Matthew 21.12-17; Mark 11.15-19; Luke 19:45-48). While they locate it near the end of Jesus' life, after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, John has it at the beginning of his ministry. Most likely St John has rearranged his account to highlight certain aspects that are prominent in his account of Jesus' ministry (especially that he would replace the Temple and its feasts). This should cause us no anxiety for in addition to being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Evangelists were also creative geniuses (John above all) with unique literary and editorial skills.

The Temple-cleansing is a strange and compelling story, which should remove any idea of Jesus being simply 'meek and mild.' This is him at his prophetic best! We do not know exactly why he chose to do this though as the Temple functioned as a kind of bank (since Roman coins bearing the image of the Emperor had

to be exchanged for Jewish money) there was probably also considerable corruption and exploitation going on.

However, in reading John's account we should focus on the interpretation offered by the Evangelist himself. It is an excellent description of how all four gospels came to be written: at the time things were not fully understood but after Easter when Jesus died and rose again and sent the Holy Spirit, the disciples came to understand more fully what he had done.

The key is in his enigmatic words, misunderstood at the time by all his hearers: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Evangelist explains that he was speaking of the temple which was his body.

## The Christian Understanding of the Temple

The Temple at Jerusalem was the centre of the Jewish religion. Desired by David it was built by his son Solomon. Destroyed by the Babylonians, it was still being rebuilt in the time of Jesus (and hence was known as the 'Second Temple'). It was indeed finished only a few years before its final destruction by the Romans in A.D.70, an event that Jesus had prophesied would occur. For the Jews, God dwelt in the Holy

of Holies (without however ceasing to fill all heaven and earth with his glory).

Therefore Jewish people visited the Temple and arranged for sacrifices to be offered there. It was a place of unceasing pilgrimage and worship, served by the High Priest and a priestly team, where God had promised one could encounter him. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Temple for the Jewish religion at the time of Jesus: its destruction generated the two groups that we today call Christians (the Church) and Jews (the Synagogue). Christians believe that Jesus replaced the Temple and its offerings, just as his Eucharist replaced the Passover sacrifice and meal. (N.B. however, though he replaced those with himself and fulfilled the Jewish religion he did not simply abolish it: the Jews, as Paul knew, (Roman 9-12), remain for ever God's first covenant partners on to whom we Gentiles have been grafted).

Jesus' words in this passage relocate the notion of 'temple' for Christians. It now has three meanings:

- The Temple is his actual body because he is the Word-made-flesh (John 1. 14) in whom all the fulness of God is pleased to dwell (Colossians 1.19).
- The Temple is also the Christian community, called by St Paul the Body of Christ and made so by sharing in the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 12.27; 1 Corinthians 10. 17).
- Each baptised believer becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, in whom as Jesus promised, the Father and the Son come to dwell (John 14. 23).

For Christians the true temple is not a building made of stones. It is made up rather of living beings – Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God and all we who are united to him by faith, baptism and Holy Communion.

## Practical Implications for the Christian Life

This vital truth has never been more apparent than in this era of struggle with the Covid19 pandemic. Deprived of participation in worship in our buildings, we soon learnt that the much harder deprivation has

been the occasional cutting off of community. Yet we have also learnt to recognise the deeper bonds between us – not just social factors, friendship, or even simple fellowship, but that we are always one in the Mystical Body of Christ. 'Mystical' means 'hidden' and 'secret'. Jesus dwelling in our hearts through the Holy Spirit is the glue that binds us together, and makes us the temple where God can dwell.

There are also spiritual and moral consequences to Christ's action of cleansing the Jerusalem Temple:

### **Spiritual**

He called the Jewish people back to what was really important – their Temple not as a place of buying and selling but of adoration and presence to God. We should not misinterpret this: as Paul recognised, (2 Corinthians 9), money is important so that the Church can fulfil her mission - but it is never the most important thing. The mission is what matters: to proclaim the Kingdom of God that has come in Jesus and to show it through our common life in his Body the Church, which is the temple of God's glory.

### **Moral**

In addition, Jesus asks us to enter into the temple of our own hearts and drive out anything that distracts us from the Lord's presence, so that

we can focus on God in wonder, love, and adoration. Paul tells us that we must continually rededicate ourselves to the service of God, who dwells in us: 'Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7. 1).' The deepest temple is within us! Therefore we have to work to complete its consecration to God. The Christian life is a call to liberty (Galatians 5. 1; 2 Corinthians 3. 17), freedom from inner compulsions and external attractions – the freedom of a life lived under the guiding hand of God.

- How should the Church manage money so as not to lose its focus on the worship of God and proclamation of his Kingdom?
- What prevents the Church and each one of us from living in the freedom of the Spirit?
- What spiritual disciplines help me to enter the temple of my heart so as to worship the Holy Trinity in spirit and in truth?

## Collects for the Third Sunday of Lent



Almighty God,  
whose most dear Son went not up to  
joy but first he suffered pain,  
and entered not into glory before he  
was crucified: mercifully grant that  
we, walking in the way of the cross,  
may find it none other than the way  
of life and peace; through Jesus  
Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive  
and reigns with you, in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for  
ever. Amen.

## Study Questions

- How do I as a Christian - and how does the community in which I participate - function as the temple of the Holy Spirit in our society?

Eternal God, give us insight  
to discern your will for us,  
to give up what harms us,  
and to seek the perfection we are  
promised in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Merciful Lord, grant your people grace  
to withstand the temptations  
of the world, the flesh and the devil,  
and with pure hearts and minds to  
follow you, the only God;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.