

Dedication Festival

Last Sunday in October, if date unknown

Principal Service readings

1 Chronicles 29.6-19	Freewill offerings and David's prayer of thanks
Psalms 122	Rejoicing in Jerusalem, and praying for its peace
Ephesians 2.19-22	Christ, the corner-stone of the holy temple
John 2.13-22	Jesus cleanses 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 market-place!' 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.' ²⁰They 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

All the gospel writers include this story, but only John has it near the beginning of his gospel, while the others have it near the end, as part of the escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities of the day (Mark 11.15-17; Matthew 21.12-13; Luke 19.45-46).

There is a strong concentration on the Jewish context of what happens in this scene. The motivation for Jesus' going to Jerusalem is the Passover feast (celebrated on the 14 and 15 Nisan – March-April) and so his presence in the Temple. 'The Jews' for the first time become active protagonists.

Jesus discovers merchants in the Temple area selling the oxen, sheep and pigeons necessary for the Temple cult. They were also changing the Roman money into Tyrian money so that people could pay the Temple tax without using coins bearing effigies. These things are not intrinsically wrong. For Jesus, the Temple is not just a place where people gather, which has degenerated into a marketplace, but 'the house of my Father' (2.16).

The first reaction to Jesus' claim comes from the disciples (2.17). They accept what he says, interpreting it by recalling the Septuagint version of Psalm 69.10. However, there is a change in the tense of the verb from the original 'has consumed me' to here 'will consume me'. An important point is the disciples' recognition of Jesus' future life and death struggle.

The religious authorities ask for a 'sign', for the prophetic act of zeal to be authenticated. In John's gospel Jesus never works 'signs' as miraculous proofs, but the 'sign' is a visible revelation of the *doxa* (glory), as in 2.11.

At the heart of this conflict is Jesus' perception that these religious people have all the signs they need, yet they do not recognise what the signs point to. They have been given the scriptures, the law, and the Temple itself, and have been faithful up to a point. But they do not see where these signs point. They have allowed themselves to forget that these signs are not just a way of life, but point to the greater reality of God himself. The Word, Jesus lived among them, but was unrecognised except to a tiny minority.

Quotations

1

The soul must long for God in order to be set aflame by God's love. But if the soul cannot yet feel this longing, then it must long for the longing. To long for the longing is also from God.

Meister Eckhart, c.1260 – c.1328

2

We have to cross the infinite thickness of time and space – and God has to do it first, because he comes to us first. Of the links between God and man, love is the greatest. It is as great as the distance to be crossed. So that the love may be as great as possible, the distance is as great as possible. That is why evil can extend to the extreme limit beyond which the very possibility of good disappears. Evil is permitted to touch this limit. It sometimes seems as though it overpassed it.

Gravity and grace / Simone Weil. 1947

Related topics

For further study:

The mystery of the church

Closing Prayer

All things come from you, O God,
and from your many gifts of skill and labour
this place whose dedication we recall today
was built to shelter your Church.
Speak to us here of Christ,
whose body we are called to be,
that your Church may be built on him,
as a spiritual house of prayer for all,
and a holy temple for your glory.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Celebrating the Christian Year · Dedication, Year C²

2 *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*