

November 9: Dedication of St. John Lateran

Gospel for the feast of the dedication of the Lateran Basilica, and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn* 2:13-22)

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and

overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; you shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade.”

His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for thy house will consume me.” The Jews then said to him, “What sign have you to show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he spoke of the temple of his body.

When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

Commentary

In the days before the feast of the Passover, Jesus travels to Jerusalem. To understand the context, it is helpful to consider the deep meaning of the Temple for the Jews, expressed each year on the anniversary of its Dedication. On this feast day, the Jews commemorated the consecration of the Temple carried out by the Maccabees in the year 164 BC, after it had been desecrated three years earlier by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This feast day was also called the “feast of lights” in reference to the seven-branched candelabrum that was always lit and symbolized the Presence of God, who sees everything and who is the light of the world. Wherever that light was present, the darkness of paganism and idolatry was dispelled. Thus we can see our Lord’s actions here as purifying and consecrating the Temple anew, which is his Father’s

house and for which he is consumed by zeal.

Both those men and we are subject to the temptation to make religious life a “market,” a business: to use God for our own interests. And in the end this can be seen as a desecration of the Temple. In the house of God there can only be one Lord; God alone is the reason for everything else, and he can never be made use of for other aims. Therefore by expelling the merchants and money changers, Jesus invites us to purify our intentions, so that our search for God is as pure and disinterested as possible, and truly stems from love.

But God ‘s temple is not only the building made of stones. Ultimately, it is the Body of Christ, the Church. She is God’s house in the strict sense. He dwells in her, illuminating and vivifying her. Jesus encourages us to look at the Church with eyes of faith

and to do all we can to preserve her without stain or wrinkle. Each one of us has to feel responsible for doing so through our own lives. The baptized, as living stones, make up the visible face of the holiness of the Church before men, a face that is called to attract those outside and give light and encouragement to those within.

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