

**Reflection on the Gospel-3rd Sunday of Lent Year B  
(John 2:13-25)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Today's gospel passage foreshadows the death of Jesus. As a devout Jew, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem at Passover. His final going-up will be the occasion of his death and resurrection. The Jerusalem Temple, Judaism's most holy place, is the site of a dramatic incident, an event that is recounted in all four gospels. The Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) locate it towards the end of the gospel. They present it as a catalyst for the intensification of hostility between the temple authorities and Jesus. John's gospel, in contrast, places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The tension between Jesus and the temple authorities that is to culminate in his death in all four gospels is thus present from the outset in John.

Jesus acts decisively, even violently, to draw attention to the primary function of God's "house". He creates an effective weapon, a whip of cords, and comprehensively clears the temple precinct of merchants, sheep, and cattle. He overturns the tables of the money-changers, orders the dove-sellers out and tells them all, in words that evoke the prophecy of Zechariah (14:21), to stop making God's house "a market-place". Zechariah had declared that, in the end times, there would no longer be traders in God's house. There was legitimate commercial activity associated with temple worship, such as the purchase of animals and doves for sacrifice, a practice we might now critique, and the conversion of money to pay the Temple tax. The traders seem to have forgotten that this activity was a means to an end and not an end in itself.

In John's account, the disciples partially understand: they interpret Jesus' actions in the light of Psalm 69:9: "It is zeal for your house that has consumed me". "The Jews" request a "sign ... for doing this". In other words, they ask Jesus to demonstrate the source of his authority for his actions. His response is a challenge: "Destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up". "The Jews" misunderstand. This provides Jesus with the opportunity to play on the word "temple": the temple is not only a material edifice that took forty-six years to build. It is also, metaphorically, his body that will be destroyed and raised up "in three days". The narrator provides the explanation and indicates that the disciples will eventually understand and come to belief. It is important to note that John writes with the wisdom of hindsight. It is also important to note that the designation "the Jews" is neither a reference to the people of Judaea nor to the dispersed Jewish people. In John's gospel, it refers to those who reject Jesus as the Anointed One of God, the Christ. As we travel the journey to Jerusalem this Lent, we are invited to keep everything in balance, and to remember that God, and not the opponents of Jesus, will have the final word in this drama.