

THE EMMAUS SERIES

3rd Sunday of Lent, Year B

Exodus 20:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

John 2:13-26

Stop making my Father's house a marketplace

The dramatic intervention, whereby Jesus drove the merchants and money changers from the Temple, may well have triggered the events which led to his death. As the gospel of Luke puts it, Jesus – knowing that his end was drawing near – ‘resolutely looked toward Jerusalem’ (9:51). It is in the holy city that he must meet the fate that was becoming inevitable. For all faithful Israelites, the journey to Jerusalem was a journey to the Temple. How old Israel loved the Temple! It was the place of God’s presence. Their faith in that presence was so vivid, that to take part in the Temple worship was ‘to see the face of God’, as the Psalms put it.

The prophets of Israel sometimes performed gestures that had a lesson for the people. What Jesus did – disrupting the normal proceedings of the Temple precincts – was more than a lesson in reverence. It pointed to the new order of things he was to inaugurate. True worship was only darkly foreshadowed in the old Temple’s ceremonial. In John’s gospel, we remember, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that true worship will not be tied to some particular sanctuary; it will be worship ‘in spirit and truth’ (4:24). Now he promises a ‘sign’ to confirm his prophetic gesture: ‘Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up’. When he had risen from the dead, his disciples recognised that ‘he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body’.

The first reading from Exodus, proclaiming the commandments which were an essential part of the covenant God made with his people in the desert, matches the gospel in today’s liturgy, because it calls us to a worship that is authentic – through the renunciation of the false securities we are tempted to put in the place of God.

With Jesus leading us, we look towards what lies at the end of our journey. The reading from the letter to the Corinthians points to the Cross, the astounding inauguration of the new order of things which will take place at the end of the Saviour’s journey to the Holy City. In this new order of things, we can all worship the Father ‘in spirit and in truth’: through the Paschal Mystery – our sharing in the life and worship of the Risen Lord. We are able to share in his gift of himself to the Father, as he becomes for us ‘the power and the wisdom of God’. In the drama of the Cross, ‘God’s foolishness’ is to prove ‘wiser than human wisdom’; and ‘God’s weakness’ is shown to be ‘stronger than human strength’.

John Thornhill sm