



Daily Reflections

November 9, 2017

Scripture

John 2: 13-22

Since the Passover of the Jews was near,
Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves,
as well as the money-changers seated there.

He made a whip out of cords

and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen,
and spilled the coins of the money-changers

and overturned their tables,

and to those who sold doves he said,

"Take these out of here,

and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

His disciples recalled the words of Scripture,

Zeal for your house will consume me.

At this the Jews answered and said to him,

"What sign can you show us for doing this?"

Jesus answered and said to them,

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

The Jews said,

"This temple has been under construction for forty-six years,
and you will raise it up in three days?"

But he was speaking about the temple of his Body.

Therefore, when he was raised from the dead,

his disciples remembered that he had said this,

and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.

Our Scripture Reflection

What is it that's caused Jesus to become so angry that He becomes a holy terror? It can only be one thing: injustice.

The sacrificial system in the temple had evolved, over the centuries, into an efficient machine for fleecing rich and poor alike, earning a great deal of money for the insiders who ran it. If you went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, your goal was to sacrifice an animal, according to the law of Moses. You could bring your own sacrificial animal, of course, but many who had journeyed from afar found it easier to purchase a beast locally, at a steep markup.

The law said you had to present a perfect animal, without mark or blemish. Unless you purchased a pre-approved animal within the temple precincts, you had to bring your offering before an inspector, who would tell you whether or not it met the grade. The inspectors were in cahoots with the animal-sellers, who knew how to grease their palms with silver. Rarely did they grant approval for a sacrificial animal brought in from the outside.

There was something else. If you had journeyed from one of the lands of the Jewish diaspora -- Greece, Egypt, Asia Minor, even distant Rome -- the coins jingling in your purse would have been imperial coins, engraved with the Emperor's likeness. Such graven images violated the Second Commandment, and so were forbidden within the temple precincts. In order to buy yourself a sacrificial animal, you had to first exchange your Roman money for image-free Judean coins. The money changers, who had a monopoly, charged exorbitant commissions, but the poor pilgrims had no recourse. They got them coming and going, those temple merchants.

The reason Jesus raged through the temple had nothing to do with the proximity of money to a place of worship, as some modern commentators have assumed. His anger was sparked by injustice: the fact that the temple had been transformed into a corrupt machine for cheating pilgrims out of their life savings.

Food for your Journey

Rats and roaches live by competition under the laws of supply and demand; it is the privilege of human beings to live under the laws of justice and mercy.

--Wendell Berry, "Economy and Pleasure," What Are People For? (Counterpoint, 2010), 135.

A Prayer from the Heart

Dear Jesus, Help me always to do what is just and right in Your sight. May I have the compassion to seek justice for those who are unable to do so on their own. Amen.