

John 2: 13-22

In the Temple

The Jewish Temple was considered the centre of Jewish worship. The Romans allowed Jewish worship to continue in the Temple and in turn, the Temple authorities encouraged loyalty to the Roman Empire. Prayers for the emperor were offered in the Temple every day. Nevertheless, Roman money was considered unclean, so a business opportunity developed that enabled pilgrims to exchange their money into the acceptable currency used to pay the annual Temple tax. In the lead-up to Passover every year, money-changers set up stalls in the Temple forecourt. A visitor who wanted to make a sacrifice to seek forgiveness for sins could buy a cow or a sheep. Doves, (or pigeons, as we might call them), were the cheapest acceptable sacrifice and were purchased by Mary and Joseph when they presented Jesus to the Temple.

When Jesus spoke of a *bandit's den / den of thieves* (or, more feebly, *market place*), he was quoting from the OT prophet Jeremiah. At the time, Jeremiah was critical of a corrupt Temple leadership who practiced injustice and 'shed innocent blood'. Perhaps Jesus was not so angry at the Temple traders as with the priests – they were the real thieves, robbing people spiritually and materially. Perhaps Jesus saw much of the worship offered at the Temple as a sham, hence he chased away the people buying and selling.

Perhaps Jesus was opposed to the whole political- economic -religious system. The money-changers were there because of a Temple tax imposed on people already burdened by Roman taxes. The pigeons were sold to the

poor. Maybe Jesus was furious that the poorest worshippers were pressurised to spend their limited money before they could engage in worship.

The church is always in danger of becoming the new Temple. We note here that Jesus said *his body* was a temple that would be destroyed and raised again. In short, the stone and mortar was about to become irrelevant. When it was raised, the body of Christ would become the new community of those who fed the hungry, healed the sick, prayed for, helped and comforted those in need.

To reflect: At this time, when we are worshipping outside the church building, let's remind ourselves that it is when we are Christ's body, living as he lived, in him and for him, that we can be called the House of God.