

Friday of the Thirty-third Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Lk 19:45-48): Jesus entered the temple area and proceeded to drive out those who were selling things, saying to them, “It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.” And every day he was teaching in the temple area. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people, meanwhile, were seeking to put him to death, but they could find no way to accomplish their purpose because all the people were hanging on his words.

“My house shall be a house of prayer”

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Today, Jesus' gesture is prophetic. As the old prophets used to do, He makes a symbolic action, full of future implications. By casting out of the temple the merchants who were selling their offerings to their victims and evoking that “my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Is 56:7), Jesus was announcing the new status He was about to commence, where the sacrifice of animals was out of the question. St. John will define this new cultural relationship as “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24). The figure must give way to reality. St. Thomas Aquinas poetically said: “Et antiquum documentum / novo cedat ritui” (“Lo! over ancient forms departing / newer rites of grace prevail”).

The New Rites are Jesus' Word. This is why Saint Luke linked the scene of the purification of the temple with Jesus preaching there every day. The new worship is centered in the prayer and in the hearing of God's Word. But, in fact, the central core of the Christian institution is the living person of the very Jesus, with His own flesh offered and His own blood shed at the Cross and given to us in the Eucharist. Saint Thomas also beautifully remarks it: “Recumbens cum fratribus (...) se dat suis minibus” (“Seated with His chosen band (...) gives Himself with His own hand”).

In the New Testament Jesus inaugurates, there is no need for veal or lamb merchants. In the same way as “all the people were hanging on his words” (Lk 19:48), we do not have to go to the temple to make sacrifices in order to receive Jesus, the true lamb sacrificed once for all when he offered himself for us (cf. Heb 7:27), and to join our life to His.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Therefore, all run together as into one temple of God, as to one altar, as to one Jesus Christ who came forth from one Father, and is with and has gone to one” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch)
- “The temple with its worship is "demolished" with Christ’s crucifixion; Its place is now taken by the living Ark of the Covenant – the crucified and risen Christ.” (Benedict XVI)
- “Jesus went up to the Temple as the privileged place of encounter with God. For him, the Temple was the dwelling of his Father... After his Resurrection his apostles retained their reverence for the Temple (Cf. Acts 2:46).” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 584)