

A House of Prayer Twenty-second Week in Ordinary Time Friday, November 20, 2015
8:15 AM 1Mc 4:36-37, 52-59; **Lk 19:45-48** (He cleans out the Temple to replace it with himself, his offering to God: a new way of relating to God, becoming one with God by being one in will with God, by desiring that God's kingdom come to earth.)

One of the statements that constantly was repeated by Pope Benedict was the **“hermeneutics of continuity.”** By that he met the way of **looking at Scripture and at theology and at history in a way that everything is a continuous line**, so that pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II are seen as part of one continuous progress, not with a sort of dividing line separating one from the other.

And yet in Scripture there are quite a few dividing lines separating the old from the new in rather drastic and dramatic ways, and this is one of them: Jesus' attitude toward the Temple. There is no hermeneutics of continuity here. The whole idea of what the Temple had become is something that Jesus found repugnant. The Temple, meaning the building in Jerusalem, became a symbol of a particular religious way of life and a religious system of sacrifices and rituals. And it all depended on animals. And of course animals, according to the Book of Genesis, were created for nothing other than ritual sacrifice. Animals were not created to feed people, according to the Book of Genesis. They were created for sacrifice. So in that sense there is this idea already in the Israelite religion that, well, they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. **Jesus however finds it offensive because it isn't serving really true worship**

He talks to the woman at the well; **he talks about worship in Spirit and truth.** Well, what is that? **Apparently very different from what he found at the Temple.** What is it that Jesus is getting at? **Here he criticizes the Temple for being a “den of thieves.”** Well, a den is a hiding place. And this corresponds to the idea of hypocrisy. He accuses the teachers of being hypocrites. A hypocrite is an actor. An actor is not really who he portrays. An actor is pretending. **A thief in a den is hiding.** These are all important images of how Jesus perceived things. He was not happy. He was not promoting a hermeneutics of continuity. **He was promoting a hermeneutics of radical change, and yet radical return since radical itself means root, *radix*, root, return to roots, return to the origin.** And one of his favorite expressions, quoted by the evangelist, is “In the beginning it was not so.” So he is claiming to know what God originally intended, and what

he sees in front of him is not what God intended.

That same spirit has to be part of our lives if we are going to be Christian, if we are to follow Christ. We have to be asking: **What does God really intend?** What is it that God really wants? Here he said, **“My house shall be a house of prayer.”** Well, that’s actually different from a place of sacrifice. A house of prayer—prayer is lifting up the heart and mind. It is **a matter of awareness, focus, attentiveness.** Sacrifice doesn’t require any of that. So this is about what God really wants, what God really intends, what things are really for.

And although the Book of Genesis says before the time of Noah that animals are really for sacrifice, later on it relents and says, no, human beings can eat them, at least some of them, not all of them. Then it distinguishes between the clean and the unclean. The unclean are not good for anything, but the clean can be eaten, as well as sacrificed.

Jesus’ view is radically different. Jesus’ view is that what **God really wants is the heart and the mind**, which is what is lifted up in prayer. God wants that offered to him, so not only one’s attention and one’s focus, but actually **one’s will and one’s desire.** That’s what Jesus is talking about by making himself the sacrifice. **He cleans out the Temple to replace it with himself**, but not himself per se, but his offering to God: a new way of relating to God, **becoming one with God by being one in will with God**, by being one in mind with God, by desiring that the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven, by **desiring that God’s kingdom come to earth.** This is Jesus’ idea of worship in Spirit and truth. This is Jesus’ idea of what the Temple is for. This is Jesus’ idea of what it means to be a child of Abraham.