

The Meaning of the Temple Dedication of the Cathedral of St. Raymond in Joliet Friday,
May 26, 2017 8:15 AM **1 Pt 2:4-9; Jn 2:13-22** (we now can offer spiritual
sacrifices, and he means of ourselves, spiritual sacrifices of ourselves, of our wills.)

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

If you want to follow the development, the evolution if you want to call it that, of faith from the earliest days to Christ and beyond, you can study what is meant by the temple. **What is the temple?** In the time of Moses the temple was **a tent**, and the dimensions of the tent were exactly the same as **the dimensions of the mobile throne room of the pharaoh that was taken into battle**. Whenever the pharaoh was fighting, he had a throne room exactly the dimensions of the tent that became the sanctuary of the Hebrews. **In that tent the Hebrews put the Ark of the Covenant**; that was its essential feature until the Ark was lost.

The Ark of the Covenant **contained two tablets**, which had the stipulations of the Torah, the covenant. Now some people think that the two tablets had one to five and six to ten of the commandments. No, the two tablets had all ten because that’s how covenants were made. There were two tablets, **one was a so-called carbon copy. But God never took his copy with him**; he left it with the people. So they had their copy and God’s copy in the Ark of the Covenant. **And because God’s copy was there, they regarded this as a sacred place and believed that therefore God stayed with them through the stipulations of the covenant** that he never took with him, so the idea of the abiding presence of God.

Now in time, even in the time of David, the idea that God should dwell in such a humble place became embarrassing, especially when David wanted a palace for himself. But Nathan the prophet told him, well, you aren’t going to build God a temple because you aren’t worthy; you have shed too much blood. Your son will do it, and he did. But actually the **temple Solomon built** was not that great. **Its size and dimensions and beauty is greatly exaggerated**; it was actually much smaller and simpler, but it was **made of cedar**. Later on that was too small and therefore it had to be expanded and eventually this **magnificent stone structure arose called the temple of Herod**. And it really was something quite beautiful.

So Jesus comes into this temple, but he is not too happy because what he sees is that **the whole meaning of worship has been commercialized**. And that's because the essential meaning was lost. When we commercialize something its value is lost. **The meaning of sacrifice in the first place was a symbol of oneself**. One sacrificed an animal because an animal is a living being and one wanted to become one with the source of life, expressing gratitude for everything, especially life, and then ritualizing by a meal, the enjoyment of life, which is of course God's will for us. **But it had become a business and now people were just buying animals for the priests to sacrifice and they weren't involved at all in a gift of themselves**.

Now **Jesus knew that what the Father wanted was worship in spirit and truth**. That's what he told the Samaritan woman. So now he cleans out all these animals because it is now time for the real worship to take place, which is of himself. **He is not only the temple, he is also the sacrifice, and he is also the priest**. He is all three. And this is the heritage he gives to his people. That's why Peter in the first reading talks about how **we now can offer spiritual sacrifices, and he means of ourselves, spiritual sacrifices of ourselves, of our wills**.

It's very good and worthy to contribute to the well-being of others, to give to the Church and to the work of the Church, but **it's only really a holy act of devotion when it is a sharing in the work of God, voluntarily and intentionally**. It's not good enough simply to give one's money. That could be just a substitute like a dove or an ox. Jesus' whole intention is it become part of you, that you give yourself to God. And that's the meaning of **the Mass, that we are invited to share Jesus' sacrifice to the Father by offering ourselves to the Father**. That's worship in spirit and truth, and that's what the Father truly desires.