

**Cleansing of the Temple**      Thirty-third Week in Ordinary Time      Friday, November 24, 2017    8:15 AM    1 Mc 4:36-37, 52-59;    **Lk 19:45-48**    St. Andrew Dung-Lac, priest, and companions, martyrs    (This is a watershed moment in the life of Israel, not only in Jesus' personal life, but in the life of Israel there is a transformation of the Temple itself.)

**“It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.’”**

The so-called **cleansing of the Temple**, which in this particular gospel, Luke, is not presented as some sort of remarkable occurrence, but it's an everyday event. It's really **one of the watershed moments in the life of Christ**. In the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel according to John, you will see this on more than one occasion. It doesn't actually mean that it happened more than once, but rather John's style is to repeat what is really important so that you pay attention to it. But the cleansing of the Temple is a remarkable moment because what Jesus did was he **got rid of the very animals that were being sacrificed**. Now you can't have a temple without sacrifice, at least not traditional temple, and that's exactly what he did: he threw out the people selling the pigeons and the doves and whatever else was for sale and drove out the animals.

Now there is this comment here found only in Luke's version; it's actually a quotation from one of the prophets. “My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it **a den of thieves**.” That refers to of course the fact that all along the Temple was in a way desecrated by underhanded sorts of practices. A den is a hiding place. So one of the ideas here is **people who are really dishonest are hiding within the precincts of a holy place**. Jeremiah mocks people because they think that merely because they are physically in the Temple area that they are somehow protected. He says, “You say, ‘The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord,’ what does that mean?” **So this idea of what is a temple, what is it supposed to be, what is/has it become, what is Jesus trying to do with it?**

Well it was supposed to be a place of rest for the Ark of the Covenant. **Originally that's what the Temple was, a place of rest for the Ark of the Covenant**. And by the way, **it was also a physical representation of the creation**, having seven parts as there are seven days of creation. I won't go into that. But originally the Temple was a tent—it was a tent—housing the Ark of the Covenant and seven different symbols of the creation. **So it was something meant to renew both**

**people's sense of God as the Creator and God as the origin of the covenant.** This is, you might say, a two-fold relationship. God as Creator is a relationship shared by the entire creation, and then God as origin of the covenant is a special relation with Israel that involved a certain amount of trust and faithfulness on Israel's part in reciprocity. **But in time the whole idea got misdirected, and the Temple became a place where people came to be in awe of the architecture.** That's still true in many places. People go into a church, not really to gather with the people of God, not to renew faith, not to pray, but to marvel at the architecture or the art or the statuary. That's not the purpose. It isn't necessarily wrong, but it's not the purpose.

But more pointedly is the **expelling of the animals**, driving away the animals. Now Luke really downplays this, but Matthew plays it up and so does John, how he drove out all the sheep and the oxen and the pigeons and the doves, and so on. That is really significant because it's saying that now **this is a watershed moment in the life of Israel, not only in Jesus' personal life, but in the life of Israel there is a transformation of the Temple itself.** It's a return to something more simple, on one hand **a place of prayer**, but on another hand it is also indicating that **Jesus is now becoming the Temple because it's Jesus who will offer himself in sacrifice to the Father.** And since Luke and Matthew and John write their gospels after the death and resurrection of Christ, they clearly understood this. They clearly understood the meaning of the cleansing of the Temple. Jesus was replacing all those animals with himself. He is the true Lamb of God. He is the true sacrifice offered to the Father that is truly pleasing to the Father.

Now this means that **the sacrifices to some degree were really empty and vain**, but prophets said that for a long time. Malachi had said it, and many of the prophets said similar things. **So this is a moment of change and transformation for the people of Israel, for the Jews, for Jesus himself.** But as we know, here are the chief priests, scribes, and leaders of the people who are resisting. They don't want to change. They don't want to admit what isn't working, and they don't want to see what God really wants. That's the drama.