

III LENT– 7th March 2021

**DESTROY THIS TEMPLE, AND IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP – Biblical
Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

John 2,13-25

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Continuing on the Lenten journey, the church is preparing us for the traumatic moment of the death and murder of Jesus; but why was Jesus killed? Today's Gospel will reveal the reason. The people, the disciples themselves, his family recognized in Jesus the Messiah, but the Messiah they were waiting for was a reformer Messiah of the sacred institutions of Israel. Well, the new relationship that is proposed by Jesus between God and man, involves the disappearance of the institutions of the old alliance. Yet the prophets had announced the activity of a God who would come to purify, to sanitize these institutions, starting with the temple, the law and the priesthood; Jesus did not come to reform, he did not come to purify, but he came to eliminate, because the new relationship that he proposes with the Father no longer needs these institutions.

And the first, we see it in today's Gospel, is the temple of Jerusalem. Jesus enters the temple and what does he find? That the true God of the temple is not his Father, but it is interest and money, this was the soul of the temple. Then Jesus, writes the evangelist, takes a whip of cords. This was the image of the Messiah who would come to punish sinners, that is, those excluded from the temple. Jesus Messiah takes a whip, but he does not punish sinners, the excluded of the temple, but those who are really the soul of the temple, those who are the commerce of the temple; why? The priests, the religious institution have defaced the image of God and made him a God who absorbs and reduces the energy of man. In the bible we read God's imperative several times, "*..none shall appear before me empty-handed.*" (Exodus 34,20) the priests interpreted it literally! And so it was all a continuous income for the sacrifices, for the prayers, for the obligatory tax to be given to

the temple. Jesus presents a completely different God: a God who does not ask, but gives, a Father who does not absorb the energies of men, but communicates to man, life; a God who asks every creature to be welcomed in order to merge with him, expand his capacity to love, and here is the revelation that Jesus will make in this passage of the Gospel and which he will then extend to every believer, so that every person becomes the only true sanctuary in which God's love is manifested.

That's what Jesus will say when faced with the reaction to his actions, he will speak of his body as the sanctuary of God. The Father of Jesus is neither far away in heaven nor in a temple, but he is within the person. Jesus, in this gospel (ch.14,23) will announce “*If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*” Man is the new sanctuary of the Spirit, man is the new home of God.

But this is dangerous for the institution because, if man is this sanctuary of God, then what is presented as the temple, the sanctuary of God, no longer has the right to exist. Here then, is the reason for the murder of Jesus: Jesus and the temple are incompatible, one demands the elimination of the other and the priestly caste in power for its own convenience, the high priest in a dramatic meeting of the Sanhedrin will say “*It is necessary for us to kill this man, otherwise the whole religious institution is doomed.*”