

**...HE WAS SPEAKING OF THE TEMPLE OF HIS BODY - Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

***John 2,13-22***

***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,[c] 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.***

The new relationship between God and humanity proposed by Jesus leads to the disappearance of the old alliance and in these, the first that John presents us with, in his gospel, is the temple. While the prophets denounce a hypocritical worship and hope for the cleansing of the temple, Jesus goes further and abolishes it.

This is what we read in John's gospel chapter 2, 13-22. "*The Passover of the Jews was at hand,..*" The evangelist is controversial, because the Passover in the Old Testament is always called, "the Easter of the Lord", but for John the Passover is for the Jews. With the "Jews" in this gospel, it does not refer to the Jewish race, but the authority, the religious leaders.

.It is not a feast of the liberation of the people, but it is the feast of the dominators of this people. "*..and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple, he found ...* He did not find people praying, but finds trade, commerce. "*In the temple, he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.*" The true God of the temple is money.

*"And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple,.."* The Messiah is seen with a whip, the scourge, with which He had to chase those excluded out of the temple, the sinners. Here Jesus takes the whip, but throws out those that are the soul of the temple.

*"he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep...."* the first thing the sheep, that is the image of the people, those that are the true sacrificial animal. *"... with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables."* Jesus does not accept worship of a God of self-interest. *"And he told those who sold the pigeons,.."* it is strange that Jesus is angry with those that sell the pigeons and not with those of the oxen. And He says: *"Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."*

Why is Jesus angry with those who sell pigeons? Because it was the animal that the poor could offer. Jesus does not tolerate that the poor are exploited in the name of God. And, quoting the prophet Zechariah He says that the house of His father cannot be a place of self-interest and commerce.

His disciples misunderstand Jesus' gesture and think He is a kind of Elijah, the prophet that with his violent zeal would prepare the way of the Messiah; in fact His disciples remember that it had been written; *"Zeal for your house will consume me."* So the Jews, religious leaders, said to him, *"What sign"* meaning with what authority, *"do you show us for doing these things?"*

*"Jesus answered them, " ....And to understand Jesus' reply it is necessary to distinguish the difference between the two words used by the evangelist. The Greek word "ieros", temple, means all the sacred area, but the other word in Jesus' reply is "naos" meaning the sanctuary of this temple, indicating the presence and residence of God in this temple.*

It is the second word that appears in Jesus' reply. *'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'* For Jesus death is the maximum manifestation of God. The Jews, the leaders do not understand. *"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*

With Jesus the relationship with God changes. With Jesus the truth from which God manifests and radiates his mercy, his compassion, is not a sanctuary built by the hand of man, where the people go to take offerings, but a true unique sanctuary will be the person of Jesus and all those who will welcome it as a model of life, a sanctuary that does not wait for a person but will come to meet the people. To meet whom? Those excluded from the temple, those outcast from religion.

This new sanctuary will not ask for offerings, but it will be Him that offers His love to all mankind.

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