

Third Sunday of Lent: March 7, 2021

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

A Reflection on the Gospel (John 2: 13-25)



The cleansing of the temple has been painted many times, and with good reason. It's quite the scene. The benevolent teacher is angry! Tables are flipped! An artist has plenty of creative license in showing the anxious faces and twisting bodies of the vendors as they clear out.

My reflecting took me to the website of the National Gallery to look at one of the El Greco paintings of this Gospel. El Greco puts the familiar scene where he was living at the time – Venice: palazzos in the background, gold and marble everywhere.

This got me thinking about what we bring from our lives and times in listening to this gospel. When do our experiences open our minds and hearts to allow the gospel to guide us? When do our experiences work in the opposite direction,

identifying something superficial in the story, saying “hey I felt like that,” and returning to our lives unchanged?

The closest I have come to flipping tables recently is losing my cool over the state of the house when the whole family is inside all day, continually getting out new toys to pile on top of the toys already on the floor. We start tidying, and certain family members inevitably begin playing with the toys they are supposedly putting away.

And then I get angry all over again and threaten to take away cartoons.

Everyone has moments of anger and frustration. Perhaps we even justify our anger with some higher purpose, or “zeal for your house” as the psalm quoted in the gospel says. But is Jesus’s understandable frustration over religious profiteering the whole story?

Luckily, we have the gospel of John and the clues it gives to a deeper meaning. The basics of the story are the same in all four gospels. However, only the gospel of John includes, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,” tying the cleansing of the temple to the death and resurrection of Christ.

Jesus was not just upset with dishonest dealings of the particular vendors that day.

Driving out the money-changers was a signal that he brought a new understanding of God, no longer the tit-for-tat God, who has to be bought off with sacrificed sheep and special temple coins.

God is not an accountant; we are not pinching pennies to buy his love. And we should not be accountants in our own relationships, starting new days with yesterday’s debts of anger or frustration.

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