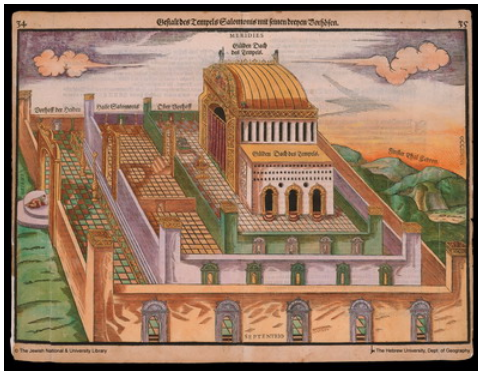


Reflection on the Third Sunday of Lent

Though certainly not as dramatic as those of the A cycle, the lectionary readings for the B cycle of Lenten Sundays do put us in touch with the great themes and rich symbols of the Lent / Easter cycle. The desert, the mountain, the temple, the brazen serpent and the grain of wheat all become revelatory for us. They are symbols of struggle and encounter in the “fierce landscapes” of desert and mountain. They are paradoxical symbols—a temple destroyed, a serpent that heals, a grain of wheat that dies and rises to new life.

In the third Sunday of Lent, we have what David Stanley calls one of Jesus’ “prophetic charades.” This moment, like the foot washing of his disciples at the last supper, announces something unheard of, something entirely new in the ordinary script that religion followed. How could someone destroy a temple that took forty-six years to build and then raise it up in three days? Absurd. How could someone who says he is the saviour of the world do something so menial as to wash the feet of his disciples? Is he mad?

Are these dramatic signs that Jesus performs meant to shake up the establishment, ourselves included, or as Paul says, to convince us of the folly of God (1 Cor 22-25)?



The scene of Jesus evicting the moneychangers from the Temple (John 2:13-35) is often used to show that Jesus had feelings and could get angry. Indeed, he expressed his displeasure violently. However, we would be missing something if we didn't consider that Sunday's liturgy is telling us in no uncertain terms that Jesus is the new temple. Jesus is the temple where we may worship God in spirit and in truth. The measure of my encounter with this Jesus is the measure of my religion. And it is in this new and *true* Temple that the Law is fulfilled, that the commandments give life and justice, and that

the precepts of the Lord gladden the heart (Ps 18:2).

It's not a bad idea to re-visit the Ten Commands of the Law (Exodus 20:1-17) at this time in our global financial crisis. Perhaps we need to think seriously about the Law that leads to life because it's quite obvious that the commandments, long forgotten and serially violated, do contain the wisdom of God for a wholesome and happy lifestyle. And we commit ourselves to relying on God, now more than ever. In comparison with our own wisdom, even God's foolishness is greater—and that's not just rhetoric!

The communion antiphon reminds us of the joy and comfort it is to dwell in the house of the Lord, like a swallow in its nest. And so we too ask for the grace to dwell in that Temple of God who is Christ—to come without money (Is. 55), to come with our many thirsts, to the One whose decrees are true, whose precepts are purer than the finest gold and whose command gives light to our eyes.

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