

For faithful Israelites, the journey to Jerusalem was always a journey to the Temple. The importance of the Temple to ancient Jewish life cannot be overstated. It was the very center of their lives. Scripture refers to Jerusalem as the “true pole of the Earth” because the Temple was there and therefore, all of creation was seen as revolving around it.

Most importantly, it was the place of God’s presence. Their faith in that presence was so vivid, that to take part in the Temple worship was ‘to see the face of God’, as the Psalms put it.

Since Passover would have been attended by many thousands of Jews and even faithful Gentiles, it would have been nearly impossible for everyone to bring their own animals for Sacrifice. Many worshipers depended on being able to buy an animal in the city. Money changing was a necessity as many foreign coins were considered idolatrous as they would often have the image of the Emperor, who had declared he was a god. ++ To a limited extent, it actually made sense to sell within the Temple’s outer-most walls. Inflated prices of the animals and a fee for the coin exchange may have been out of line, but would hardly be unexpected.

So why drive out the merchants and money changers?

We could choose to look at it as a condemnation of corrupted faith... one where the rules were more important than the reality... or.... in the light of social justice, because the poor were being treated unfairly, in the dealings. ++ Perhaps it is a lashing out against the profane treatment of the temple itself.

These would all be correct and valid explanations. But if we limit it to them, then we run the risk of missing something else that is very important.... the person and authority of Jesus.

The ancient prophets of Israel sometimes performed gestures that had a strong and often harsh lesson for the people. Jesus’ action would have caused quite a stir, and it is no wonder that the Temple leaders would ask for a “sign” to prove His authority to cleanse the Temple. Their underlying question was “are you a prophet or, even more daring, are you the messiah?”

What Jesus did – in disrupting the normal proceedings of the Temple marketplace – was much more than a lesson in reverence.

It pointed to the new order of things He was to inaugurate.

Jesus promises to confirm his prophetic action in the Temple by this sign:
“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”

So, His “sign” to them is the Cross and Resurrection.

The rejection and crucifixion of Jesus means the end of the Earthly Temple.

The Resurrection is the building of the New Temple.

In His body, the Risen One gathers people of all nations and unites them, through the waters of Baptism and in the Sacrificial Sacrament of His body and blood.

In Baptism we become members of His Mystical Body, the Church.

In the Eucharist we worship in the most perfect way as we are present at His once-for-all sacrifice at Calvary. It is here at the Mass that we are able to share in His - gift – of - Himself to the Father, as He becomes for us, as St. Paul puts it ‘the power and the wisdom of God’

It is in the Cross and the Resurrection that Jesus has authority as the one who ushers in true worship..... something that was only foreshadowed in the old Temple’s ceremonies and sacrifices. Christ would complete it and perfect it.

The first reading from Exodus, proclaiming the commandments....., the Old Covenant..., matches the gospel in today’s liturgy, because it calls us to a worship that is authentic – through the renunciation of the false securities we are tempted to put in the place of God.

In this new order of things, this New Covenant, which does not eliminate the Old, but rather fulfills it, we can all worship the Father ‘in spirit and in truth’..... through the Paschal Mystery – our sharing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our Lenten sacrifices of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving, unmask for us what is and is not of Spirit.... what is and is not of truth.

It shows us our own weaknesses and our strengths, but most importantly, it helps to put everything in a more proper perspective. We come to be more able to embrace our own crosses, so that we may truly embrace the Cross of Christ and that we might more fully rejoice at the Resurrection.