

## St Pius & St Anthony Feast St John Lateran (would be 32<sup>nd</sup> Sun-2025) John 2:12-20

Like an Australian cattle herd drover (Hugh Jackman in this 2008 movie), Jesus moves along and out of the Temple, the collection of animals gathered there for sale and sacrifice! Quite a dramatic scene! Jesus clears the chaotic barnyard of the outer Temple court! It reminds me of another movie scene in the classic 1982 movie ET when ET's earth friend Elliot releases all the frogs from the school science lab, yelling 'Go Back to the river, back to woods, You are free'.) Of course, the teacher didn't see it as a such a noble act, and so Elliot gets dragged off to the principal's office (*like Jesus will be shortly arrested according to the synoptic versions of the Temple Cleansing*).

But I need to add up front, (to our and St Francis' relief) Jesus' issue is not with the animals themselves-he is not enacting a prohibition against animals being near the sanctuary of God. No, Jesus' problem is with the commercialization of religion (& economic exploitation of worshippers in religion's name). the animals were at the center of the scam, because of the laws about Temple Sacrifice.

The animal courtyard was advertised as the convenience of a guaranteed acceptance of your sacrifice – let us provide them for you. But it was a mafia style deal you couldn't refuse, because the Temple also held authority to accept or reject any contribution you brought from home (the animal had to be unblemished and who oversaw the certification of blemished or unblemished? Yes, the Temple!) It was racket! So even if you tried to save a little and bring your own lamb from home, well any nick or scuff on its little paw, could render it 'unacceptable' and you still had to buy one at the door! (is that like entertainment venues who have big signs, "No outside food/drink allowed in", and they are only too helpful to sell you pennies worth of popcorn for five dollars?) So it is a racket, and they got you!

As if that wasn't enough criminal exploitation of devout worshippers, then comes the additional layer of cheating, with the moneychangers. Another Temple law, forbade the use of any money that a human image (like Caesar) on it, since that was graven image and idol, and so there is a market for that, and the Temple was only glad to provide a currency exchange service for you, where you could take your regular money and trade it (for a handling FEE) for the 'Temple-legal' right currency (*Is that like **having** to use a credit card today at certain businesses, oh, which has a transaction fee on the sale-which means you have to spend money to Spend Money! Whatever happened to cash? And watch for next level crypto-scam fees that will appear once it gets popular enough!*) So all such commerce infuriated Jesus, and his running of them all out of the Temple, was his way of saying, "In no world is it okay, to demand of people that they have to **pay to pray**."

So, Jesus' issue here is with the 'money money money' atmosphere that had taken over the Temple. It was no longer a place of heartfelt prayer. No, it had become a place of heartburn, over how else the Temple authority could squeeze

more tax or fees from prayerful patrons. (I imagine that is part of why Samaritans wrote off whole Jerusalem Temple Scheme and stayed up in Samaria, choosing to find God on Mt Gerizim, a holy site-they said ‘No to Retail Religion!’) In response, Jesus’ action today in John 2, of clearing out the animals and merchants and the currency-changing middlemen, was an act of reforming Temple Worship. Get back to basics—Temple is House of Prayer, not House of Prosperity for a few greedy elite at the expense of the many Temple-going pilgrims.

Jesus had been on to, for some time, the powers-that-be that encouraged this exploitation (for sure Caesar and the Romans, but also certain religious authorities like the Temple Priest Class, especially King Herod) Over in Luke 7:25, Jesus had critiqued Herod, without naming, “Those who live ... (luxuriously) & sumptuously are found in royal palaces...”. Jesus calls Herod a ‘fox’ (Luke 13:32) for how cunning at cheating people Herod was (‘leave nothing unstolen’-- Herod’s motto)

Just as we hear in today’s gospel about Herod’s glitzy building campaigns, he not only rebuilt (added on) grossly the Temple, but Historians document how he rebuilt his Palace next door to the Temple (siphoning off Temple revenue), right next door, but his palace to higher height than the Temple, so his golden veranda, (symbolically He was ‘looking down’ on the Temple!) allowed him to oversee it the pilgrims to take his own attendance numbers and ensure his proper cut was honored by the priests he didn’t trust (more corruption). It just goes on and on, so Jesus was exposing all of that – bad witness – let’s cast that all out of the Temple.

What does Jesus propose to reform it? The Temple’s original purpose- **Prayer**. It should be a House of Prayer! God’s House-a Home open for all people, with or without money. A place where God is adored and people find peace. Jesus reminds us that the Temple is the dwelling place of God – a sanctuary- there’s no fee exacted to worship God. The Temple is where God is encountered.

And Jesus not only ushers out the door all the commerce from the Temple, he also ushers in the door again, the peace and presence of God – Himself. In fact he will declare the New Temple to be Himself. In John 2:19, Jesus suggests that when the Temple is destroyed, He will rebuild it in three days. John the gospel writer tips us off that Jesus is referring to the Temple of his own body(2:21-22)! His presence replaces the Temple. Wherever Jesus is, there’s the Temple. He’s it!

In another scripture passage, when Jesus gets attacked for not upholding the exact Temple law regarding sabbath, He responds, “I say to you, ***something greater than the temple is here***”(Matt 12:6). Yes, it is Jesus! He is the New Temple. And where else do we hear this but when Jesus ushers in the New Covenant (a New Covenant means a new style of worship, therefore New Temple to worship in- And it is Christ – the Body of Christ- Holy Eucharist is our New Temple!) Recall that the Temple was the dwelling place of God, where God’s presence was found – and after Jesus’ Last Supper sacrifice, where is Jesus’ Real

Presence? But right here in the Holy Eucharist, where His words become Flesh (Jn 1:14) anew. Jesus' Body and Blood is the New Temple. Wherever Jesus is, there is the Temple-Presence of God. Wherever Jesus' Body and Blood are beheld-adored, there is the New Temple. His Body and blood offered, shed and shared (not sold) for the forgiveness of our sins. That's new (rebuilt in the three days of his death and resurrection-Easter). Jesus becomes our New Temple, and by our reception of Jesus in Holy Communion, He enters into us (Jn 6:56), or we enter into His Presence. And not just us. For St Paul teaches that by our baptism, we become Temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) to share in Jesus' offer of Himself, through our compassionate care and consideration of others served in His Image *'(whatever you did to least of my brothers sisters you did to me... 'Matt 25:40)*. So, we also visit Jesus in the Temple of each precious life around us and when we love/live Him. Jesus is our New Temple, our place of sanctuary where God is truly worshipped *(John 4:21, 23 "Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem....but the hour is coming, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.")*