

## St Thomas Aquinas Commentary on St John's Gospel

12 After this he went down to Capernaum together with his mother, his brethren and his disciples; but they did not remain there many days. 13 The Jewish Passover was near at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple precincts he came upon merchants selling oxen, sheep and doves, and moneychangers seated at tables. 15 And when he had made a kind of whip from cords, he drove everyone, including sheep and oxen, out of the temple, swept away the gold of the money changers, and knocked over their tables. 16 To those selling doves he said, "Get Out of here! And stop making my Father's house into a marketplace." 17 His disciples then remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house consumes me."

Above, the Evangelist presented the sign Christ worked in order to confirm his disciples; and this sign pertained to his power to change nature. Now he deals with the sign of his resurrection; a sign pertaining to the same power, but proposed by Christ to convert the people.

The Evangelist does two things as to this miracle. First, he mentions its occasion. Secondly, the prediction of the miracle (v 18). As to the first he does two things. First, he describes the place. Secondly, he tells of the incident which was the occasion for proposing this miracle (v 14). Now the place where this happened was Jerusalem. And so the Evangelist recounts step by step how the Lord had come to Jerusalem. First, then, he shows how he went down to Capernaum. Secondly, how he then went up to Jerusalem. As to the first he does three things. First, he mentions the place to which he went down. Secondly, he describes his company. Thirdly, he mentions the length of his stay.

The place to which Christ went down was Capernaum; and so he says, **After this**, i.e., the miracle of the wine, **he went down to Capernaum**. Now as far as the historical truth is concerned, this seems to conflict with Matthew's account that the Lord went down to Capernaum after John had been thrown into prison (Mt 4:12), while the entire series of events the Evangelist refers to here took place before John's imprisonment.

I answer that in order to settle this question we should bear in mind what is learned from the *Ecclesiastical History*, that is, that the other Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, began their account of the public life of Christ from the time that John was thrown into prison. Thus Matthew (4:12), after describing the baptism, fast and temptation of Christ, began at once to weave his story after John's imprisonment, saying: "When Jesus heard that John had been arrested." And Mark (1:14) says the same: "After John had been arrested, Jesus came into Galilee." John, who outlived the other three Evangelists, approved the accuracy and truth of their accounts when they came to his notice. Yet he saw that certain things had been left unsaid, namely, things which the Lord had done in the very first days of his preaching before John's imprisonment. And so, at the request of the faithful, John, after he began his own Gospel in a loftier manner, recorded events that took place during the first year in which Christ was baptized before John's imprisonment, as is plain from the order of the events in his Gospel. According to this, then, the Evangelists are not in disagreement. Rather, the Lord went down to Capernaum twice: once before John's imprisonment (which is the one dealt with here), and once after his imprisonment, which is dealt with in Matthew (4:13) and Luke (4:31).

Now "Capernaum" means "very pretty village," and signifies this world, which has its beauty from the order and disposition of divine wisdom: "The beauty of the land is mine" (Ps 49:2). So

the Lord went down to Capernaum, i.e., this world, with his mother and brethren and disciples. For in heaven the Lord has a Father without a mother; and on earth a mother without a father. Thus, he significantly mentions only his mother. In heaven he does not have brothers either, but is “the Only Begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father” (above 1:18). But on earth he is “the Firstborn of many brothers” (Rom 8:29). And on earth he has disciples, to whom he can teach the mysteries of the divinity, which were not known to men before: “In these days he has spoken to us in his Son” as we read in Hebrews (1:1).

Or, “Capernaum” means “the field of consolation”; and this signifies every man who bears good fruit: “The odour of my son is like the odour of a fruitful field” (Gn 27:27). Such a person is called a field of consolation because the Lord is consoled and rejoices in his achievement: “God will rejoice over you” (Is 62:5), and because the angels rejoice over his good: “There is joy in the angels of God over one repentant sinner” (Lk 15:10).

His companions were, first of all, his mother. So he says, **with his mother**, for because she had come to the wedding and had brought about the miracle, the Lord accompanied her back to the village of Nazareth. Nazareth was a village in Galilee, whose chief town was Capernaum.

Secondly, his companions were his brethren; and so he says, **his brethren** (*fratres*, brothers, brethren). We must avoid two errors here. First, that of Elvidius, who said that the Blessed Virgin had other sons after Christ; and he called these the brothers of the Lord. This is heretical, because our faith maintains that just as the mother of Christ was a virgin before giving birth, so in giving birth and after giving birth, she remained a virgin. We must also avoid the error of those who say that Joseph fathered sons with another wife, and that these are called the brothers of the Lord; for the Church does not admit this.

Jerome refutes this opinion: for on the cross the Lord entrusted his virgin mother to the care of his virgin disciple. Therefore, since Joseph was the special guardian of the Virgin, and of the Saviour too, in his childhood, one may believe that he was a virgin. Consequently, it is a reasonable interpretation to say that the brothers of the Lord were those related to his virgin mother in some degree of consanguinity, or even to Joseph, who was the reputed father. And this conforms to the custom of Scripture which generally refers to relatives as brothers. Thus we read: “Let us not quarrel, for we are brothers” (Gn 13:8), as Abram said to Lot, who was his nephew. And note that he distinguishes between relatives and disciples, because not all of Christ’s relatives were his disciples; hence we read: “Even his brethren did not believe in him” (below 7:5).

Thirdly, his disciples were his companions; hence he says, **and his disciples**. But who were his disciples? For it seems, according to Matthew, that the first ones to be converted to Christ were Peter and Andrew, John and James; but they were called after John’s imprisonment, as is clear from Matthew (4:18). Thus it does not seem that they went down to Capernaum with Christ, as it says here, since this was before John’s imprisonment.

There are two answers to this. One is from Augustine, in his *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, namely, that Matthew does not follow the historical order, but in summarizing what he omitted, relates events that occurred before John’s imprisonment as though they happened after. So, without any suggestion of a time lapse he says, “As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers” (Mt 4:18), without adding “after this” or “at that time.” The other answer, also by Augustine, is that in the Gospel not only the twelve whom the Lord chose and

named apostles are called disciples of the Lord (Lk 6:13), but also all who believed in him and were instructed for the kingdom of heaven by his teaching. Therefore, it is possible that although those twelve did not yet follow him, others who adhered to him are called disciples here. But the first answer is better.

His stay there was short; hence he says, **but they did not remain there many days**. The reason for this was that the citizens of Capernaum were not eager to accept the teachings of Christ, being very corrupt, so that in Matthew (11:23) the Lord rebukes them for not doing penance in spite of the miracles done there and of Christ's teaching: "And you Capernaum, will you be lifted up to heaven? You will go down to hell. For if the mighty works that were done in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have stood until this day." But although they were evil, he went there to accompany his mother, and to stay there for a few days for her consolation and honour.

As for its mystical sense, this signifies that some cannot remain long with the many words spoken by Christ; a few of these words are enough for them, to enlighten them, because of the weakness of their understanding. Hence as Origen said, Christ reveals few things to such persons, according to "I have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now" (Jn 16:12).

Then when he says, **The Jewish Passover was near at hand**, he mentions the place to which he went up. And concerning this he does two things. First, the occasion is given. Secondly, the going up.

Now the occasion for his going up was the Jewish Passover. For in Exodus (13:17) it is commanded that every male be presented to the Lord three times a year; and one of these times was the Jewish Passover. So, since the Lord came to teach everyone by his example of humility and perfection, he wished to observe the law as long as it was in force. For he did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it (Mt 5:17). And so, because the Passover of the Jews was at hand, he went up to Jerusalem. So we, after his example, should carefully observe the divine precepts. For if the Son of God fulfilled the decrees of a law he himself had given, and celebrated the great feasts, with what zeal for good works ought we both to prepare for them and observe them?

It should be noted that in John's Gospel mention is made of the Passover in three passages: here, and in (6:4), when he worked the miracle of the loaves, where it is said: "Now the Jewish Passover was near at hand", and again in (13:1), where it says: "Before the feast day of the Passover." So, according to this Gospel, we understand that after the miracle of the wine Christ preached for two years plus the interval between his baptism and this Passover. For what he did here occurred near the Passover, as it says here, and then a year later, near the time of another Passover, he performed the miracle of the loaves, and in the same year John was beheaded. Thus John was beheaded near the time of the Passover, because we read in Matthew (14:13) that immediately after John was beheaded Christ withdrew to the desert, where he worked the miracle of the loaves; and this miracle took place near Passover time, as stated below (6:4). Nevertheless, the feast of this beheading of John is celebrated on the day his head was found. It was later, during another Passover, that Christ suffered.

So, according to the opinion of those who say that the miracle worked at the wedding and the events being discussed here occurred in the same year in which Christ was baptized, there was an interval of two and one half years between Christ's baptism and his passion. So, according to

them, the Evangelist says, **The Jewish Passover was near at hand**, in order to show that Christ had been baptized just a few days before.

But the Church holds the opposite. For we believe that Christ worked the miracle of the wine on the first anniversary of the day of his baptism; then a year later, near Passover time, John was beheaded; and then there was another year between the Passover near which John was beheaded and the Passover during which Christ suffered. So between the baptism of Christ and the miracle of the wine there had to be another Passover which the Evangelist does not mention. And so, according to what the Church holds, Christ preached for three and one half years.

He says, **the Jewish Passover**, not as though the people of other nations celebrated a Passover, but for two reasons. One, because when people celebrate a feast in a holy and pure way, it is said that they celebrate it for the Lord; but when they celebrate it in neither of those ways, they do not celebrate it for the Lord, but for themselves: “My soul hates your new moons and your feasts” (Is 1:14). It is as though he said: Those who celebrate for themselves and not for me, do not please me: “When you fasted, did you fast for me?” (Zec 7:5), as if to say: You did not do it for me, but for yourselves. And so because these Jews were corrupt and celebrated their Passover in an unbecoming manner, the Evangelist does not say, “the Passover of the Lord,” but the Jewish Passover was at hand.

Or, he says this to differentiate it from our Passover. For the Passover of the Jews was symbolic, being celebrated by the immolation of a lamb which was a symbol. But our Passover is true, in which we recall the true passing [passion] of the Immaculate Lamb: “Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7).

The journey was to Jerusalem, and so he says, **and Jesus went up to Jerusalem**. Note here that according to the historical order, Jesus went up to Jerusalem near the time of the Passover and expelled the merchants from the temple on two occasions. The first, before John’s imprisonment, is the one the Evangelist mentions here; the other is mentioned by Matthew (21:13) as occurring when the Passover and the hour of his passion were at hand. For the Lord frequently repeated works that were similar. For example, the two cases of giving sight to the blind: one in Matthew (9:28) and another in Mark (10:46). In like manner he twice cast merchants from the temple.

In the mystical sense, Jesus went up to Jerusalem, which is translated as the “vision of peace,” and signifies eternal happiness. It is to here that Jesus ascended, and he took his own with him. There is no lack of mystery in the fact that he went down to Capernaum and later went up to Jerusalem. For if he did not first go down, he would not have been suited to go up, because, as it is said: “He who descended is the same as he who ascended” (Eph 4:10). Further, no mention is made of the disciples in the ascent to Jerusalem because the ascent of the disciples comes from the ascent of Christ: “No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man, who lives in heaven” (below 3:13).

Then when he says, **In the temple precincts he came upon merchants selling oxen, sheep and doves**, the Evangelist sets down what moved Christ to propose the sign of the resurrection. He does three things with this. First, he exposes the faulty behaviour of the Jews. Secondly, he discloses Christ’s remedy (v 15). Thirdly, he gives the announcement of the prophecy (v 22).

With respect to the first, we should note that the devil plots against the things of God and strives to destroy them. Now among the means by which he destroys holy things, the chief is avarice; hence it is said: “The shepherds have no understanding. All have turned aside to their own way; everyone after his own gain, from the first one to the last” (Is 56:11). And the devil has done this from the earliest times. For the priests of the Old Testament, who had been established to care for divine matters, gave free rein to avarice. God commanded, in the law, that animals should be sacrificed to the Lord on certain feasts. And in order to fulfil this command, those who lived nearby brought the animals with them. But those who came a long distance were unable to bring animals from their own homes. And so because offerings of this kind resulted in profit for the priests, and so animals to offer would not be lacking to those who came from a distance, the priests themselves saw to it that animals were sold in the temple. And so they had them shown for sale in the temple, i.e., in the atrium of the temple. And this is what he says: **In the temple precincts he came upon merchants selling oxen, sheep and doves.**

Mention is first made of two land animals, which according to the law could be offered to the Lord: the ox and the sheep. The third land animal offered, the goat, is implied when he says “sheep”, similarly, the turtle-dove is included when he says “doves.”

It sometimes happened that some came to the temple not only without animals, but also without money to buy them. And so the priests found another avenue for their avarice; they set up moneychangers who would lend money to those who came without it. And although they would not accept a usurious gain, because this was forbidden in the law, nevertheless in place of this they accepted certain “collibia”, i.e., trifles and small gifts. So this also was turned to the profit of the priests. And this is what he says, **moneychangers seated at tables**, i.e., in the temple, ready to lend money.

This can be understood mystically in three ways. First of all, the merchants signify those who sell or buy the things of the Church: for the oxen, sheep and doves signify the spiritual goods of the Church and the things connected with them. These goods have been consecrated and authenticated by the teachings of the apostles and doctors, signified by the oxen: “When there is an abundant harvest the strength of the ox is evident” (Prv 14:4); and by the blood of the martyrs, who are signified by the sheep: so it is said for them: “We are regarded as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom 8:36): and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, signified by the doves, for as stated above, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. Therefore, those who presume to sell the spiritual goods of the Church and the goods connected with them are selling the teachings of the apostles, the blood of the martyrs, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, it happens that certain prelates or heads of churches sell these oxen, sheep and doves, not overtly by simony, but covertly by negligence; that is, when they are so eager for and occupied with temporal gain that they neglect the spiritual welfare of their subjects. And this is the way they sell the oxen, sheep and doves, i.e., the three classes of people subject to them. First of all, they sell the preachers and labourers, who are signified by the oxen: “Happy are you who sow beside all the streams, letting the ox and the donkey range free” (Is 32:20); because prelates ought to arrange the oxen, i.e., teachers and wise men, with the donkeys, i.e., the simple and uneducated. They also sell those in the active life, and those occupied with ministering, signified by the sheep: “My sheep hear my voice” (below 10:27); and as is said in 2 Samuel (24:17): “But these, who are the sheep, what have they done?” They also sell the contemplatives, signified by the doves: “Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly?” (Ps 54:7).

Thirdly, by the temple of God we can understand the spiritual soul, as it says: “The temple of God is holy, and that is what you are” (1 Cor 3:17). Thus a man sells oxen, sheep and doves in the temple when he harbours bestial movements in his soul, for which he sells himself to the devil. For oxen, which are used for cultivating the earth, signify earthly desires; sheep, which are stupid animals, signify man’s obstinacy; and the doves signify man’s instability. It is God who drives these things out of men’s hearts.

The Lord’s remedy is at once set forth (v 15). Here the Lord’s remedy consisted in action and in words, in order to instruct those who, have charge of the Church that they must correct their subjects in deed and in word. And he does two things with respect to this. First, he gives the remedy Christ applied by his action. Secondly, the remedy he applied by word (v 16).

As to the first he does three things. First, he drives the men out. Secondly, the oxen and sheep. Thirdly, he sweeps away the money.

He drives the men out with a whip; and this is what he **says, when he had made a kind of whip from cords**. This is something that could be done only by divine power. For as Origen says, the divine power of Jesus was as able, when he willed, to quench the swelling anger of men as to still the storms of minds: “The Lord brings to nought the thoughts of men” (Ps 32:10). He makes the whip from cords because, as Augustine says, it is from our own sins that he forms the matter with which he punishes us: for a series of sins, in which sins are added to sins, is called a cord: “He is bound fast by the cords of his own sins” (Prv 5:22); “Woe to you who haul wickedness with cords” (Is 5:18). Then, just as he drove the merchants from the temple, so he swept away the gold of the moneychangers and knocked over their tables.

And mark well that if he expelled from the temple things that seemed somehow licit, in the sense that they were ordained to the worship of God, how much more if he comes upon unlawful things? The reason he cast them out was because in this matter the priests did not intend God’s glory, but their own profit. Hence it is said: “It is for yourselves that you placed guardians of my service in my sanctuary” (Ez 44:8)

Further, our Lord showed zeal for the things of the law so that he might by this answer the chief priests and the priests who were later to bring a charge against him on this very point. Again, by casting things of this kind out of the temple he let it be understood that the time was coming in which the sacrifices of the law were due to cease, and the true worship of God transferred to the Gentiles: “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you” (Mt 21:43). Also, this shows us the condemnation of those who sell spiritual things: “May your money perish together with you” (Acts 8:20).

Then when he says, **To those selling doves he said**, he records the treatment which the Lord applied by word. Here it should be noted that those who engage in simony should, of course, first be expelled from the Church. But because as long as they are alive, they can change themselves by free will and by the help of God return to the state of grace, they should not be given up as hopeless. If, however, they are not converted, then they are not merely to be expelled, but handed over to those to whom it is said: “Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness” (Mt 22:13). And so the Lord, attending to this, first warns them, and then gives the reason for his warning, saying, **stop making my Father’s house into a marketplace**.

He warns those selling the doves by reproaching them, for they signify those who sell the gifts of the Holy Spirit, i.e., those who engage in simony.

He gives his reason for this when he says, **stop making my Father's house into a marketplace.** "Take away your evil from my sight" (Is 1:10). Note that Matthew (2 1:13) says: "Do not make my house a den of thieves," while here he says, **a marketplace.** Now the Lord does this because, as a good physician, he begins first with the gentler things; later on, he would propose harsher things. Now the action recorded here was the first of the two; hence in the beginning he does not call them thieves but merchants. But because they did not stop such business out of obstinacy, the Lord, when driving them out the second time (as mentioned in Mark 11:15), rebukes them more severely, calling robbery what he had first called business.

He says, **my Father's house,** to exclude the error of Manicheus, who said that while the God of the New Testament was the Father of Christ, the God of the Old Testament was not. But if this were true, then since the temple was the house of the Old Testament, Christ would not have referred to the temple as **my Father's house.**

Why were the Jews not disturbed here when he called God his Father, for as is said below (5:18), this is why they persecuted him? I answer that God is the Father of certain men through adoption; for example, he is the Father of the just in this way. This was not a new idea for the Jews: "You will call me Father, and you will not cease to walk after me" (Jer 3:19). However, by nature he is the Father of Christ alone: "The Lord said to me: 'You are my Son' "(Ps 2:7), i.e., the true and natural Son. It is this that was unheard of among the Jews. And so the Jews persecuted him because he called himself the true Son of God: "the Jews tried all the harder to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath rest, but even called God his own Father, making himself equal to God" (below 5:18). But when he called God his Father on this occasion, they said it was by adoption.

That the house of God shall not be made a marketplace is taken from-Zechariah (14:21): "On that day there will no longer be any merchants in the house of the Lord of hosts"; and from the Psalm (70:16), where one version has the reading: "Because I was not part of the marketplace, I will enter into the strength of the Lord."

Then when he says, **His disciples then remembered,** he sets down a prophecy which was written in Psalm 69 (v 9): "Zeal for your house consumes me." Here we should remark that zeal, properly speaking, signifies an intensity of love, whereby the one who loves intensely does not tolerate anything which is repugnant to his love. So it is that men who love their wives intensely and cannot endure their being in the company of other men, as this conflicts with their own love, are called "zelotypes." Thus, properly speaking, one is said to have zeal for God who cannot patiently endure anything contrary to the honour of God, **whom** he loves above all else: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts" (1 Kgs 19:10). Now we should love the house of the Lord, according to the Psalm (25:8): "O Lord, I have loved the beauty of your house." Indeed, we should love it so much that our zeal consumes us, so that if we notice anything amiss being done, we should try to eliminate it, no matter how dear to us are those who are doing it; nor should we fear any evils that we might have to endure as a result. So the Gloss says: "Good zeal is a fervour of spirit, by which, scorning the fear of death, one is on fire for the defence of the truth. He is consumed by it who takes steps to correct any perversity he sees; and if he cannot, he tolerates it with sadness."

18 At this the Jews responded and said, “What sign can you show us authorizing you to do these things?” 19 Jesus replied, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.” 20 The Jews then retorted, “This temple took forty-six years to build, and you are going to raise it up again in three days!” 21 He was speaking, however, of the temple of his body. 22 When, therefore, he had risen from the dead, his disciples recalled that he had said this; they then believed the Scriptures and the statement Jesus had made. 23 While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover feast, many people, seeing the signs he was working, believed in his name. 24 But Jesus did not trust himself to them, for he knew all men, 25 and he did not need anyone to give him testimony about men. He was well aware of what was in man’s heart.

Having set forth the occasion for showing the sign, the Evangelist then states the sign which would be given. First, he gives the sign. Secondly, he mentions the fruit of the signs Christ performed (v 23). As to the first he does three things. First, the request for the sign is given. Secondly, the sign itself (v 19). Thirdly, the way the sign was understood (v 20).

The Jews ask for a sign; and this is what he says: **What sign can you show us authorizing you to do these things?**

Here we should note that when Jesus drove the merchants Out of the temple, two things could be considered in Christ: his rectitude and zeal, which pertain to virtue; and his power or authority. **It was not appropriate to** require a sign from Christ concerning the virtue and zeal with which he did the above action, since everyone may lawfully act according to virtue. But he could be required to give a sign concerning his authority for driving them out of the temple, since it is not lawful for anyone to do this unless he has the authority.

And so the Jews, not questioning his zeal and virtue, ask for a sign of his authority; and so they say, **What sign can you show us authorizing you to do these things?** i.e., Why do you drive us out with such power and authority, for this does not seem to be your office? They say the same thing in Matthew (21:23): “By what authority are you doing these things?”

The reason they ask for a sign is that it was the usual thing for Jews to require a sign, seeing that they were called to the law by signs: “There did not arise again in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom, the Lord knew face to face, with all his signs and wonders,” as is said in Deuteronomy (34:10), and “The Jews require signs,” as we find in 1 Corinthians (1:22). Hence David complains for the Jews saying: “We have not seen our signs” (Ps 73:9). However, they asked him for a sign not in order to believe, but in the hope that he would not be able to provide the sign, and then they could obstruct and restrain him. And so, because they asked in an evil manner, he did not give them an evident sign, but a sign clothed in a symbol, a sign concerning the resurrection.

Hence he says, **Jesus replied**, and he gives the sign for which they asked. He gives them the sign of his future resurrection because this shows most strikingly the power of his divinity. For it is not within the power of mere man to raise himself from the dead. Christ alone, who was free among the dead, did this by the power of his divinity. He shows them a similar sign in Matthew (12:30): “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign. And a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah the prophet.” And although he gave a hidden and symbolic sign on both occasions, the first was stated more clearly, and the second more obscurely.

We should note that before the incarnation, God gave a sign of the incarnation to come: “The Lord himself will give you a sign. A virgin will conceive, and give birth to a son” (Is 7:14). And in like manner, before the resurrection he gave a sign of the resurrection to come. And he did this because it is especially by these two events that the power of the divinity in Christ is evidenced. For nothing more marvellous could be done than that God become man and that Christ’s humanity should become a partaker of divine immortality after his resurrection: “Christ, rising from the dead, will not die again... his life is life with God” (Rom 6:9), i.e., in a likeness to God.

We should note the words Christ used in giving this sign. For Christ calls his body a temple, because a temple is something in which God dwells, according to “The Lord is in his holy temple” (Ps 10:5). And so a holy soul, in which God dwells, is also called a temple of God: “The temple of God is holy, and that is what you are” (1 Cor 3:17). Therefore, because the divinity dwells in the body of Christ, the body of Christ is the temple of God, not only according to the soul but also according to the body: “In him all the fullness of the divinity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). God dwells in us by grace, i.e., according to an act of the intellect and will, neither of which is an act of the body, but of the soul alone. But he dwells in Christ according to a union in the person; and this union includes not only the soul, but the body as well. And so the very body of Christ is God’s temple. (...)

Therefore, granting this, the Lord does two things with respect to this sign. First, he foretells his future death. Secondly, his resurrection.

Christ foretells his own death when he says, **Destroy this temple**. For Christ died and was killed by others: “And they will kill him” (Mt 17:22), yet with him willing it: because as is said: “He was offered because it was his own will” (Is 53:7). And so he says, Destroy this temple, i.e., my body. He does not say, “it will be destroyed,” lest you suppose he killed himself. He says, Destroy, which is not a command but a prediction and a permission. A prediction, so that the sense is, **Destroy this temple**, i.e., you will destroy. And a permission, so that the sense is, **Destroy this temple**, i.e., do with my body what you will, I submit it to you. As he said to Judas: “What you are going to do, do quickly” (below 13:27), not as commanding him, but as abandoning himself to his decision.

**He says Destroy**, because the death of Christ is the dissolution of his body, but in a way different from that of other men. For the bodies of other men are destroyed by death even to the point of the body’s returning to dust and ashes. But Such a dissolution did not take place in Christ, for it is said: “You will not allow your Holy One to see corruption” (Ps 15:10). Nevertheless, death did bring a dissolution to Christ, because his soul was separated from his body as a form from matter, and because his blood was separated from his body, and because his body was pierced with nails and a lance.

He foretells his resurrection when he says, **and in three days I will raise it up again**, that is, his body; i.e., I will raise it from the dead. He does not say, “I will be raised up,” or “The Father will raise it up,” but **I will raise it up**, to show that he would rise from the dead by his own power. Yet we do not deny that the Father raised him from the dead, because as it is said: “Who raised Jesus from the dead” (Rom 8:11); and “O Lord, have pity on me, and raise me up” (Ps 40:10). And so God the Father raised Christ from the dead, and Christ arose by his own power: “I have slept and have taken my rest, and I have risen, because the Lord has taken me” (Ps 3:6). There is no contradiction in this, because the power of both is the same; hence “whatever the Father does, the

Son does likewise” (below 5:19). For if the Father raised him up, so too did the Son: “Although he was crucified through weakness, he lives through the power of God” (2 Cor 13:4).

He says, **and in three days**, and not “after three days,” because he did not remain in the tomb for three complete days; but, as Augustine says, he is employing synecdoche, in which a part is taken for the whole.

Origen, however, assigns a mystical reason for this expression, and says: The true body of Christ is the temple of God, and this body symbolizes the mystical body, i.e., the Church: “You are the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27). And as the divinity dwells in the body of Christ through the grace of union, so too he dwells in the Church through the grace of adoption. Although that body may seem to be destroyed mystically by the adversities of persecutions with which it is afflicted, nevertheless it is raised up in “three days,” namely, in the “day” of the law of nature, the “day” of the written law, and the “day” of the law of grace; because in those days a part of that body was destroyed, while another still lived. And so he says, in three days, because the spiritual resurrection of this body is accomplished in three days. But after those three days we will be perfectly risen, not only as to the first resurrection, but also as to the second: “Happy are they who share in the second [sic] resurrection” (Rv 20:6).

Then when he says, **The Jews then retorted**, we have the interpretation of the sign he gave. First, the false interpretation of the Jews. Secondly, its true understanding by the apostles (v 21).

The interpretation of the Jews was false, because they believed that Christ was saying this of the material temple in which he then was; consequently, they answer according to this interpretation and say: **This temple took forty-six years to build**, i.e., this material temple in which we are standing, **and you are going to raise it up again in three days!** (...)

Augustine (as is plain from the Gloss) has another mystical interpretation of this number. For he says that if one adds the letters in the name “Adam,” using for each the number it represented for the Greeks, the result is forty-six. For in Greek, A represents the number one, since it is the first letter of the alphabet. And according to this order, D is four. Adding to the sum of these another one for the second A and forty for the letter M, we have forty-six. This signifies that the body of Christ was derived from the body of Adam.

Again, according to the Greeks, the name “Adam” is composed of the first letters of the names of the four directions of the world: namely, Anathole, which is the east; Disis, which is the west; Arctos, which is the north; and Mensembria, the south. This signifies that Christ derived his flesh from Adam in order to gather his elect from the four parts of the world: “He will gather his elect from the four winds” (Mt 24:31).

Then, the true interpretation of this sign as understood by the apostles is given (v 2 1). First, the way they understood it is given. Secondly, the time when they understood it (v 22).

He says therefore: The Jews said this out of ignorance. But Christ did not understand it in their way; in fact, he meant the temple of his body, and this is what he says: **He was speaking, however, of the temple of his body**. We have already explained why the body of Christ could be called a temple.

The time when the apostles acquired this true understanding is then shown by the Evangelist when he says, **When, therefore, he had risen from the dead, his disciples recalled that he had said this.** Prior to the resurrection it was difficult to understand this. First, because this statement asserted that the true divinity was in the body of Christ; otherwise it could not be called a temple. And to understand this at that time was above human ability. Secondly, because in this statement mention is made of the passion and resurrection, when he says, **I will raise it up again;** and this is something none of the disciples had heard mentioned before. Consequently, when Christ spoke of his resurrection and passion to the apostles, Peter was scandalized when he heard it, saying, “God forbid, Lord” (Mt 16:22). But after the resurrection, when they now clearly understood that Christ was God, through what he had shown in regard to his passion and resurrection, and when they had learned of the mystery of his resurrection, **his disciples recalled that he had said this** of his body, and **they then believed the Scriptures,** i.e., the prophets: “He will revive us after two days; on the third day he will raise us up” (Hos 6:3), and “Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jon 2:1). So it is that on the very day of the resurrection he opened their understanding so that they might understand the Scriptures **and the statement Jesus had made, namely, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.**

In the anagogical sense, according to Origen, we understand by this that in the final resurrection of nature we will be disciples of Christ, when in the great resurrection the entire body of Jesus, that is, his Church, will be made certain of the things we now hold through faith in a dark manner. Then we shall receive the fulfilment of faith, seeing in actual fact what we now observe through a mirror.

Then (v 23) he sets forth the fruit which resulted from the signs, namely, the conversion of certain believers. Concerning this he does three things. First, he mentions those who believed on account of the miracles. Secondly, he shows the attitude of Christ to them (v 24). Thirdly, he gives the reason for this (v 25).

The fruit which developed from the signs of Jesus was abundant, because many believed and were converted to him; and this is what he says, **While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover feast, many people, seeing the signs he was working, believed in his name,** i.e., in him.

Note that they believed in two ways: some on account of the miracles they saw, and some on account of the revelation and prophecy of hidden things. Now those who believe on account of doctrine are more commendable, because they are more spiritual than those who believe on account of signs, which are grosser and on the level of sense. Those who were converted are shown to be more on the level of sense by the fact that they did not believe on account of the doctrine, as the disciples did, but **seeing the signs he was working:** “Prophecies are for those who believe” (1 Cor 14:22).

One might ask which signs worked by Jesus they saw, for we do not read of any sign worked by him in Jerusalem at that time. According to Origen, there are two answers to this. First, Jesus did work many miracles there at that time, which are not recorded here; for the Evangelist purposely omitted many of Christ’s miracles, since he worked so many that they could not easily be recorded: “Jesus did many other signs, and if everyone was written, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that would be written” (below 21:25). And the Evangelist expressly shows this when he says, **seeing the signs he was working,** without mentioning them, because it was not the intention of the Evangelist to record all the signs of Jesus, but as many as

were needed to instruct the Church of the faithful. The second answer is that among the miracles the greatest could be the sign in which Jesus by himself drove from the temple a crowd of men with a whip of small cords.

The attitude of Jesus to those who believed in him is shown when he says, **But Jesus did not trust himself to them**, i.e., those who had believed in him. What is this, men entrust themselves to God, and Jesus himself does not entrust himself to them? Could they kill him against his will? Some will say that he did not trust himself to them because he knew that their belief was not genuine. But if this were true, the Evangelist would surely not have said that many believed in his name, and yet he did not trust himself to them. According to Chrysostom, the reason is that they did believe in him, but imperfectly, because they were not yet able to attain to the profound mysteries of Christ, and so **Jesus did not trust himself to them**, i.e., he did not yet reveal his secret mysteries to them; for there were many things he would not reveal even to the apostles: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (below 16:12), and “I could not speak to you as spiritual persons, but as sensual” (1 Cor 3:1). And so it is significant that in order to show that they believed imperfectly, the Evangelist does not say that they believed “in him,” because they did not yet believe in his divinity, but he says, **in his name**, i.e., they believed what was said about him, nominally, i.e., that he was just, or something of that sort.

Or, according to Augustine, these people represent the catechumens in the Church, who, although they believe in the name of Christ, Jesus does not trust himself to them, because the Church does not give them the body of Christ. For just as no priest except one ordained in the priesthood can consecrate that body, so no one but a baptized person may receive it.

The reason Jesus did not trust himself to them arises from his perfect knowledge; hence he says, **for he knew all men**. For although one must ordinarily presume good of everyone, yet after the truth about certain people is known, one should act according to their condition. Now because nothing in man was unknown to Christ and since he knew that they believed imperfectly, he did not trust himself to them.

The universal knowledge of Christ is then described: for he knew not only those who were on close terms with him, but strangers too. And therefore he says, **for he knew all men**; and this by the power of his divinity: “The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun” (Sir 23:28). Now a man, although he may know other people, cannot have a sure knowledge of them, because he sees only what appears; consequently, he must rely on the testimony of others. But Christ knows with the greatest certainty, because he beholds the heart; and so **he did not need anyone to give testimony about men**. In fact, he is the one who gives testimony: “Look, my witness is in heaven” (Jb 16:20)

His knowledge was perfect, because it extended not only to what was exterior, but even to the interior; thus he says, **He was well aware of what was in man’s heart**, i.e., the secrets of the heart: “Hell and destruction are open to the Lord: how much more the hearts of the children of men” (Prv 15:11).