

## John 2:13-22

“What’s eating you?” Have you ever been asked this question? If so, it’s because you were acting oddly. Something wasn’t right, and this was obvious to those around you. People don’t ask, “What’s eating you?” when you’re calm and happy. They applaud that type of attitude. Unless, of course, something is eating them.

Jesus’ disciples did not ask this question of the Lord in our text, but they thought it in their heads. “What’s eating Jesus?” Now they didn’t exactly put it this way. They thought about the verse in Psalm 69: “*Zeal for your house will consume me,*” and they applied these words to Jesus because something was consuming Him; something was eating Him. He made a whip and drove a whole lot of people out of the temple...moneychangers, and sellers of sheep and oxen. He whipped them out of the house of God, and He overturned their tables. Coins went flying; so did the pigeons. And the Jews? They were angry! “Who in the (blank) do you think you are!” But they weren’t the only ones who were angry. Jesus was angry; at them. “*Stop turning My Father’s house into a house for business!*”

The next time someone urges you to be more “Christ-like,” I suppose you could grab a whip and flip a few tables. That would get their attention. But then, they consider being Christ-like to be gentle and loving. And this is an accurate picture of our Lord. Just not here in the temple. He’s certainly not gentle. But we could say, and in fact we should say, that He is loving. That’s what the word *zeal* is all about...love. “*Zeal for your house will consume me.*” Zeal, simply put, is angry love.

Have you ever had that? Angry love? We could also call it jealous love. A wife who sees her husband looking just a bit too intently at another woman may exhibit some zeal. Zeal for her husband consumes her. Jealous love.

But is that a bad thing? Not according to God. “*I am a jealous God,*” He declares in Exodus 20. He is that spouse who has zeal for His bride. When His people turn away from Him and begin to fasten their eyes and fix their hearts upon other gods, He has jealous love...zeal. And it makes Him angry. Angry love. Throughout the Old Testament, at many times God’s people could have asked Him, “What’s eating You?” And His reply? “You are! My jealous love for you is consuming Me!”

But would we want it any other way? Would we prefer a God who has no zeal for us? “Live how you want. Do what pleases you. I really don’t care. Here are My Ten Suggestions, but take them or leave them.” Is that the God we want? Where’s the love in that? That’s like the husband who tells his wife, “I don’t care who you’re with. I’m no jealous husband.” Well he should be. Jealous love is love. Without zeal a marriage is doomed.

Do you have zeal? One of Jesus’ disciples...not Simon Peter, but the other Simon...was called Simon the Zealot. He had zeal. For what we don’t know. But he was zealous for something. Simon the Zealot we read of him. We could apply this term to God. God the Zealot. He is zealous, jealous about you. And He is zealous for His house. “*Zeal for your house will consume me.*”

Most everyone has zeal...about something. It begins when we are babies. Hand a baby, or a toddler, a toy. Watch them enjoy it. And then just try to take that toy away from them. They will exhibit zeal...angry love. “Don’t you dare take my toy!”

What are your toys? What things in your life do you have zeal about? What things are sacred to you? We should have zeal over our spouse and children. Our love for them should become angry love when someone tries to take them away from us. This is why parents, and others, are rising up across our land against violence in schools. They are showing angry love. Their children and other loved ones are being taken away from them.

It doesn't take a Christian to have this kind of zeal. But it does take a Christian to have zeal for God. More to the point, for His Word, His Sacraments, His Commandments, His House. Our love for these holy things should become angry love when someone tries to take them away from us.

Do we have such zeal? I think that if we are honest, our zeal for God and the things of God is pretty lukewarm. Would we get all worked up as though something was eating us if we were not allowed to worship here in God's House and receive His Sacrament week, after week, after week...or read our Bible day, after day, after day? Hopefully yes, but perhaps not.

We should all be zealots because we are Christians. But here's the way it is: when someone is not trying to take away from us what is in our hand, we relax our grip, don't we? We tighten our grip only when that thing in our hand is being pulled away from us. Perhaps we have lost our zeal for the sacred things of God because we take them for granted. We relax our attitude toward Worship and the Sacrament because we can come whenever we want. We pass by the opportunities to study the Bible by ourselves, and with other Christians, because no one is telling us we can't.

God does not ever lose His zeal. He never relaxes His grip on you. He is consumed with you. He has such angry love for you that His hands bled on the cross because He was holding on to you there so incredibly tight. It wasn't the nails that kept Him up on the cross; it was His zeal for you.

Satan wants you...badly. But God's jealous love for you stands between you and the devil. Satan has to break through that divine love first. Oh he could easily pluck us away from God if it was up to us. We don't have much zeal for God. We're always relaxing our grip on Him. But God is not. And His zeal for you is what keeps you safe.

God has zeal for you and for His house. This is why He brings you here. This is where His grip on you becomes tighter and tighter. For here He speaks to you His holy word of absolution. Here He gives Himself to you in the Sacrament. Your zeal, and mine, is pretty pathetic. God forgives you, my friend. And where your zeal is lacking, His zeal is more than enough.

But don't take that for granted. "Since Jesus has me, I can relax my grip on Him." That's not how faith speaks. But rather, because God has such zeal for you; because He is consumed with you, you and I will have the desire to love Him in return; to love His House, His Sacraments, His Commandments, His Words to us. We want to live as zealots so that people ask us, "What's eating you?" And our reply? "The love of Jesus for me." Amen.