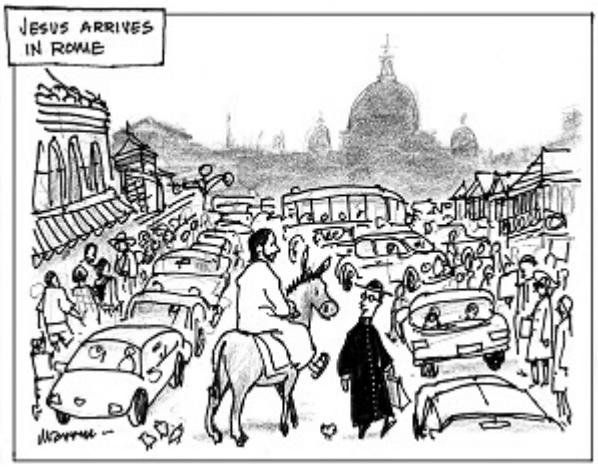
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

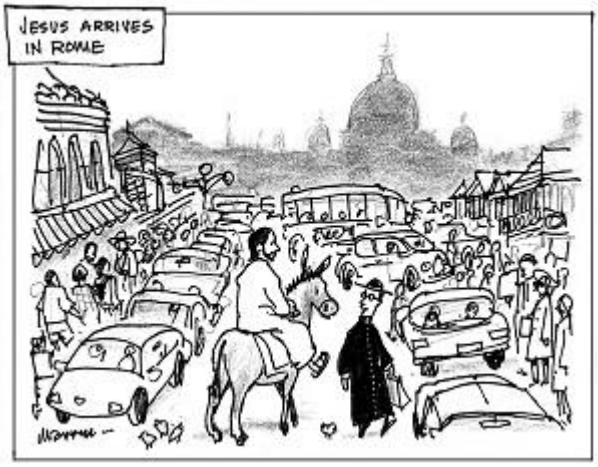
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“He was speaking about the temple of his body” (John 2:20).

Ex 47:1-2, 8-9,12; 1 Cor 3:9c-11, 16-17; John 2:13-22

Several years ago, I was given the opportunity to spend time in Mexico to learn Spanish. I visited many of the massive cathedrals built by the Spaniards at the time of the Conquest. What the colonists did militarily, the church did architecturally by literally building churches on top of Mayan and Aztec temples, using the same stones. It must have been brutally clear to the indigenous people forced to build these massive structures that they had been defeated both by the Spanish crown and the Catholic church.

Large stone structures convey permanence and superiority. From the pyramids of Egypt to government buildings and even banks in every town, large stone structures are meant to inspire confidence, why it was so shocking when our nation’s Capitol was invaded and trashed by rioters on January 6. The Temple in Jerusalem, built by Herod for the Jews, held a similar status in the first century, and when Rome destroyed it in 70 CE, it shook the very foundations of Judaism.

Today’s liturgical commemoration of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome affirms the historic importance of the Apostolic Succession of the Roman popes. It was originally the palace of a wealthy Roman family, later given to the church in the fourth century by Constantine. It has undergone major reconstruction over the centuries. Its splendor is only symbolic, as homilists over the centuries are quick to say, because the church is not any building but the believing community.

This message is reinforced by the Gospel chosen for today about Jesus cleansing the temple of corruption and religion-for-sale. St. Paul calls the church in Corinth “God’s holy building” whose foundation is Jesus Christ. In today’s Gospel, Jesus shocks both his disciples and his critics by speaking of the temple being destroyed and then raised again in three days. They realize only later that he was referring to his body, which would rise again after his death. The church is now that Mystical Body, brought to life by the breath of the Holy Spirit.

We are the Body of Christ. We celebrate this at every Eucharist. We are temples of the Holy Spirit. This mystery is beautifully expressed in a poem by e. e. cummings titled “i am a little church.” It makes a good meditation for today’s liturgy: https://allpoetry.com/i-am-a-little-church-(no-great-cathedral)

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