

Scripture Study

Third Sunday of Lent – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Exodus 20:1-17

(Ps 19:8-11)

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

John 2:13-25

Overview of the Gospel:

- The incident of Jesus cleansing the temple appears in all four Gospels. In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) it appears at the end of Jesus' ministry, while in John, from which this Sunday's reading is taken, it appears at the beginning. Most probably it occurred both times, each gospel writer including only the episode he thought most significant for his readers.
- The time is the Passover, the major feast of the Jews mentioned three times in John's gospel (6:4; 13:1). The place is Jerusalem, where nearly 80% of events related by John take place.
- Such a major feast at such an important location brought scores of pilgrims who would gather at the temple to offer the sacrifices and temple tax required of all male Jews, 19 years of age and older. Many Gentiles (non-Jews) interested in Judaism would also gather there.
- The buying and selling of sacrificial animals and the currency exchange for approved coins to pay the tax took place in the outer temple court—the Court of the Gentiles, which is the only place in the temple where non-Jews could enter and worship. As could be imagined, the noise, the dealing and the smell could scandalize visitors who came to worship the God of Israel.
- The Old Testament prophets warned Israel about profaning the temple and offering unworthy sacrifices (Jeremiah 7:10-11; Zechariah 14:20-21). It was predicted that in the last days the Messiah would appear to visit and cleanse the temple (Malachi 3:1-3).

Questions:

- In the 2nd Reading, what does St. Paul describe as a “stumbling block” and “foolishness”? Why does he say that? Has your share in Jesus' cross been a “stumbling block” or seemed like “foolishness” in your life—to yourself or others? How can you more view the cross as Jesus and St. Paul viewed it (verses 24-25; Luke 9:23)?
- How might the once useful practice of the sale of sacrificial animals at the temple have deteriorated into a racket? Why else was Jesus angry (Psalm 69:10)?
- As one of the sellers, how would you feel about Jesus' action? As one of the disciples?
- How is Jesus challenged (verse 18)? Why? What effect does this response have on them?
- Why doesn't Jesus entrust himself “to men” (see RSVCE) in verses 23-25? See John 3:1-2.
- If you compare your spiritual life to the rooms of a house, which room do you think Jesus might want to clean up this Lent: a) Library—the reading/media room? b) Dining room—appetites, desires? c) Workshop—where you keep your skills and talents? d) Family room—where most of your relationships are lived out? e) Closet—where your “hang-ups” are?
- How does Jesus' cleansing of the temple apply to the Church and to us as Christians (1 Peter 4:17; 1 Corinthians 6:13-20, especially verse 19; Hebrews 12:4-11, 14; CCC 1695)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 575, 583-586, 593, 994

Closing prayer

Ask for me inward and outward strength, that I may not merely enjoy the reputation of being a Christian, but the reality. –St. Ignatius of Antioch

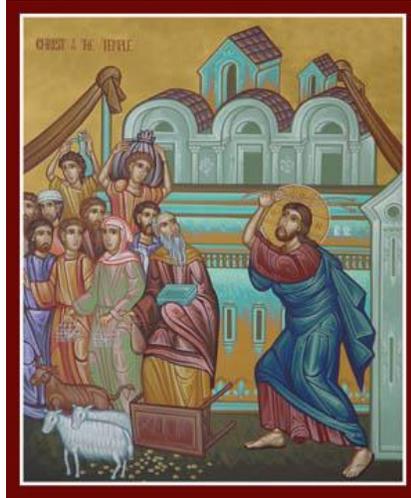
Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"

Gospel Reading: *John 2:13-25*

Meditation: What can keep us from God's presence? Jesus' dramatic cleansing of the temple was seen by his disciples as a prophetic sign of God's action. The temple was understood as the dwelling place of God among his people. When God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, he brought them through the sea, and finally to Mount Sinai where he made a covenant with them and gave them a new way of life embodied in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). God gave Moses instruction for worship and for making the Tabernacle, or Tent of Meeting, which was later replaced by the temple in Jerusalem. The New Testament tells us that these "serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary" – God's Temple in heaven (Hebrews 8:5). Jesus' cleansing of the temple is also a prophetic sign of what he wants to do with each of us. He ever seeks to cleanse us of sin so that we may be living temples of his Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Do you recognize God's indwelling presence with you and do you thirst for holiness in your personal life so that you may reflect his goodness and character within you?

When Jesus went up to Jerusalem at Passover time, he spoke of the temple as his Father's house which was being made into "house of trade" (John 2:16) and "den of robbers" (Mark 11:17). That is why he used physical force to expel the money-



chargers. The prophecy of Malachi foretold the coming of the Lord unexpectedly to his Temple to "purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord" (Malachi 3:1-4). Jesus' disciples recalled the words of Psalm 69: "Zeal for your house will consume me." This was understood as a Messianic prophecy. Here the disciples saw more clearly Jesus perform a public sign and act of judgment as the Messiah who burned with zeal for his Father's house.

The Jewish authorities, however, wanted proof that Jesus had divine authority to act as he did. They demanded a clear sign from God to prove Jesus' claim, otherwise, they would treat him as an imposter and a usurper of their authority. Jesus replied that the sign God would give would be his own resurrection from the dead: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". The Jews did not understand that the temple Jesus referred to was

his own body. The "tent of his body" had to be destroyed on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Jesus' blood which was shed for each one of us cleanses us of sin and opens the way for us to enter into the presence of the living God. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus not only reconciles us with our Father in heaven – he fills us with his Holy Spirit and make us temples of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Do you allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten and cleanse your mind of all that is contrary to his truth, love, and will for your life? The Holy Spirit will heal all that is broken within us and he will give us new hearts that seek to please God in all things. The Lord wants to heal, restore, and free us today from every sin and every obstacle that might holds us back from giving him our whole lives as a sacrifice of praise and worship. Ask the Holy Spirit to set your heart on fire with the love of God and with zeal for dwelling in the Father's house both now and forever.

"Lord Jesus Christ, you open wide the door of your Father's house and you bid us to enter confidently and joyfully that we may worship in spirit and truth. Help me to draw near to your throne of mercy and grace with gratitude and joy".

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