

March 03 III Sunday of Lent

Today's readings from Holy Scripture teach us that Lent is the ideal time to clean out the Temple of our own hearts and to offer to God proper Divine worship by obeying the Ten Commandments. They also teach us that our New Covenant with God demands that we should keep our parish Church holy, and our Divine worship vibrant by our active participation in the liturgy with hearts cleansed by repentance, and made holy by allowing the Holy Spirit to control our hearts and lives.

Today's first reading teaches us that the Ten Commandments are the basis of our religious and spiritual life. Instead of restricting our freedom, the Commandments really help us to love and respect our God and our neighbors. The Responsorial Psalm (Ps 19) depicts the Mosaic Law's life-enhancing attributes: it refreshes the soul and rejoices the heart; it is pure and true, more precious than gold. The second reading reminds us that we must appreciate the Divine "foolishness" of the crucified Christ and obey His commandment of love as our expression of Divine worship.

Today's Gospel gives us the dramatic account of Jesus' cleansing the Temple of its merchants and moneychangers, followed by a prediction of his death and Resurrection. The synoptic Gospels place the "cleansing of the Temple" immediately after Jesus' triumphant arrival in Jerusalem on the back of a colt on Palm Sunday, while John places it at the beginning of his Gospel. Jesus cleansed the Temple which King Herod began to renovate in 20 BC. The abuses which kindled the prophetic indignation of Jesus were the conversion of God's Temple into a "noisy marketplace" by the animal merchants and into a "hideout of thieves" by the moneychangers with their grossly unjust business practices – sacrilege in God's Holy Place. Jesus' reaction to this commercialized Faith was fierce. Since no weapons were allowed inside the Temple, Jesus constructed his own, a whip of cords, and used it to drive out the merchants and moneychangers.

1) We need to avoid a calculating mentality in Divine worship: Our relationship with God must be that of a child to his parent, one of mutual love, respect and a desire for the family's good, with no thought of personal loss or gain. Hence, fulfilling our Sunday obligation only out of fear of mortal sin and consequent eternal punishment (a loss), is a non-Christian approach. In the same way,

obeying the commandments and doing acts of charity merely as prerequisites for Heavenly reward (a gain), are acts driven by a profit motive, of which Jesus would not approve. Hence, let us ask ourselves these questions during this third week of Lent. Do we think of God as a vending machine into which we put our sacrifices and good deeds to get back His blessings? Do we use our acts of obedience to the Ten Commandments as bargaining chips with God?

2) We need to remember that we are the temples of the Holy Spirit: St. Paul reminds us that we are God's temples, body and soul, because the Spirit of God dwells in us. Hence, we have no right to desecrate God's temple by impurity and injustice. We are expected to cleanse our hearts of pride, hatred, jealousy, and all evil thoughts, desires, and plans. Reminiscent of what Jesus did in cleansing the Temple, we, as 21st century disciples, must, with His grace, cleanse ourselves of attitudes and behaviors that prevent us from seeing and responding to hurt wherever we find it. Let us welcome Jesus into our hearts and lives during Lent by repentance and the renewal of our lives. We will drive out the wild animals that do not belong in the holy temple of our body by making a whip of cords out of our fasting, penance, and almsgiving during Lent, and by going to Confession to receive God's loving forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

3) We need to love our parish Church and use it: Our Church is the place where we come together as a community to love and praise God. It is the holy place where we gather strength to support one another in the task of living the Gospel. It is the place where we come privately to enter into intimate conversation with God. In this building many prodigal sons and daughters have met the merciful Lord in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and have been welcomed back to our community. In this building, tears have been shed by those in pain and grief. Let's look around our Church this morning and treasure it. When we pass our Church, we might take the time to make a brief visit. Let us make our Church even more of a holy place by helping to keep it clean, by adding our prayers and songs to parish worship and by offering our time and talents in the various ministries.