

Third Sunday of Lent

March 4, 2018

Reading 1 [EX 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 19:8, 9, 10, 11.](#)

R. (John 6:68c) Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.

Reading 2 [1 COR 1:22-25](#)

Gospel [JN 2:13-25](#)

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of Scripture: Zeal for your house will consume me. At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

HOMILY

John's grandfather, though in his 90's, was known for his fierce streak of independence, still living by himself in his rural, primitive boyhood home, just like he wanted it to be! During a visit with his grandpa, after spending a great evening chatting the night away, the next morning John's grandfather prepared a breakfast of bacon, eggs and toast. However, John noticed a film-like substance on his plate, and questioned his grandfather, "Are these plates clean?" His grandfather replied, "They're as clean as cold water can get them. Just you go ahead and finish your meal, Sonny!" For lunch, the old man made hamburgers. Again, John was concerned about the plates as his appeared to have tiny specks around the edge that looked like dried egg and asked, "Are you sure these plates are clean?" Without looking up the old man said, "I told you before, Sonny, those dishes are as clean as cold water can get them. Now don't you fret, they're fine! I don't want to hear another word about it!" Later that afternoon, John was preparing to take his leave and as he was approaching his car, his grandfather's dog started to growl and wouldn't let him pass. John yelled back, "Grandpa, your dog won't let me get to my car!" Without diverting his attention from the football game he was watching on TV, the old man shouted, "BAD DOG! COLDWATER, GO LAY DOWN!"

Despite the grandfather's claims, the dishes were not fine! Overtime, he had become convinced that a clearly unsanitary way to wash dishes—his dog—was "fine." Slowly, probably, he became satisfied with a cleansing that was lacking, to say the least, even for a dog lover! *As it is with plates, so too with the soul.*

Well, Jesus is doing some cleaning in today's gospel, and his efforts are instructive as to the approach we can take to do some personal housecleaning—that is: some cleaning of our person.

This scene from the gospel of John, the second chapter, is traditionally called “the Cleansing of the Temple.” What is the Temple? The temple was seen as the very dwelling place of the Lord, our God. As the Lord said of the Temple in the Psalms, “Here I have chosen to dwell” (cf. Ps. 132:12). But, corruption had crept into this place, as is vividly on display in the marketplace into which the religious leaders in the gospel had made it! One of the great Old Testament prophecies was that the Messiah would come to cleanse the temple, particularly in the prophecies of the prophet Malachi, in his 3rd chapter. This is what Jesus the Messiah does in today’s gospel. He is trying to cleanse the temple into a place where the union between God and humanity is restored.

For us, the cleansing of the Temple is important because of what St. Paul later tells us about the Temple. In his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 6, St. Paul says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body” (vss. 19-20). The true dwelling place of God is no longer in the temple, but it is in the very bodies of the followers of Jesus. For us, then, the Temple is our body, where God desires to dwell, but in honesty we do not always glorify God in these temples! It needs a cleansing—and only Jesus can do it!

And yet, we can’t see the need for a cleaning, nor are we very good and enacting the cleansing that is needed. We tend to cling to our old ways, not even able to see how we desecrate our “temples,” and cannot even see that God desires to dwell in us. What if this Lent we allow Jesus with that whip of cords to enter into the temple of your body for a good cleansing. Our “cold water” efforts are not enough—we need warmth of Jesus’ mercy to do it! But first, we need to recognize that we need a personal cleaning! Turning our gaze to today’s first reading, the remarkable 10 Commandments and reflecting on them can be our Lenten means to discover where we’ll need a cleaning and then, in faith, ask Jesus to come with his powerful yet merciful whip of cords to clean out these things that we see and can’t clean on our own.

While we could together run through all of the Commandments at this point in a community examination of each of our needs for a temple-cleaning, instead just commandment #1 will do the job! **“You shall not have other gods besides me.”** False Gods—our lives are filled with them: things, feelings, emotions, food, drink, possessions, cell phones, all that which we have elevated to the level of “I can’t do without” but, because they have such a hold on us, we can’t really live fully with them. What are your false Gods? Can you have the courage to ask Jesus to come with his red-hot whip of mercy and vanquish them so that you and those you love can live more fully?

A good Lenten cleansing of our temples: *First*, we have to be shown that we need one (we’re not fine!); *Second*, we need to realize that our tepid efforts will not do the job. Our “cold water” won’t do it—we need the red-hot fire of Jesus’ passionate, driving, merciful purification to be cleansed from anything that can keep us from union with God. The clearest place to find that mercy is in the confession of sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We need help—we can’t do this cleansing on our own. I hope you will take the opportunity this Lent to receive the healing, cleansing mercy for your temple that only Jesus can give! Lord, drive with Your purifying love into the depth of these temples You have fashioned and cleanse us of any and all things that are keeping us from living fully! This is what Lent is all about. This is what salvation is all about. This is what You are all about.