

3 Lent B SML 2018
JN 2:13-25

A person is judged as having good character when they possess a virtue to a high and eminent degree.

- ✓ Military generals are ranked as men of great character because of their valor,
- ✓ scientists because of their wisdom,
- ✓ noblemen because of love of peace or their bravery in war.

But there is a better way to judge character. The possession of one virtue to an eminent degree no more makes a great man than one wing makes a bird. Just as an eagle's power is measured by the span of one wing to the other, so a man's character should be judged, not by the possession of one virtue, but by the span between that virtue and the opposite one which compliments it. In other words:

- ✓ great character is not just bravery, but a brave man who can be tender.
- ✓ Great character is not just love of peace, but a lover of peace who has courage.
- ✓ Great character is not just wisdom, but a wise man who enjoys simplicity.

A person of real character, then, does not possess a virtue on a given point on the circle without, at the same time, possessing the complimentary virtue with is diametrically opposed to it.

Two opposing virtues that Our Blessed Lord recommended to His Apostles at the beginning of His public life were wisdom and simplicity. “Be wise as serpents and as simple as doves.” (MT 10:16) Our Blessed Lord did not make this recommendation without possessing it Himself. He was wise with the Wisdom of God, but He was simple with the simplicity of a child. But what is more remarkable, He never used His wisdom before the simple, but only before those who thought themselves wise. Take for example, the Cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of His public ministry.

The Passover was drawing near and pilgrims from Galilee began to gather in Jerusalem. Our Blessed Lord entered through the Golden Gate into the Temple. As he passed beneath the arch and came into the Court of the Gentiles, the open space before the steps that led up to the Holy of Holies, a busy scene greeted Him. It was much more than the pushing and elbowing of the crowd to pay their yearly tribute of half a shekel to the Temple Treasury. Rather there was utter bedlam.

In the heat of that April day were hundreds of merchants and shopkeepers mingling the cry of their goods with the bleating of sheep and the bellowing of oxen. There were men with big wicker cages filled with doves, and under the very shadow of the arcades sat the moneychangers conducting the most dishonest of trades, their greedy eyes focused on the lust of gain. Everywhere there were quarreling, bargaining and the clanking of money that drowned out the chants of the Levites and the prayers of the priests. And all of this at the entrance of the Temple of the Most High.

When Our Blessed Lord entered, a righteous indignation laid hold of Him. Our Lord's indignation was very much part of His perfect Sanctity. And as He reached for what was probably a yoke rope for the oxen:

- ✓ traffickers stood still,
- ✓ merchants eyed Him with growing fear,
- ✓ and shopkeepers stepped back from Him Who they had every reason to fear.

The crowd yielded as sheep and cattle broke free and fled. He overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, as they rushed to the floor to gather up their coins rolling in the filth and pollution. To the owners of the doves, He said, "Get these out

of here and stop making my Father's house a place of trade.”
 And His disciples, witnessing all of this, called to mind what David has prophesied, “Zeal for your house consumes me!”
 (PSM 69:10)

Why didn't the greedy traffickers resist as their oxen were chased into the street and their money flung on the floor?

- ✓ Because sin is weakness;
- ✓ because there is nothing in the world so utterly miserable and completely helpless as a guilty conscience;
- ✓ because nothing is so powerful as Godlike indignation against all that is base and wrong;
- ✓ because vice cannot stand for a moment before Virtue's uplifted arm.

As base and low as they were, every one of them who had a remnant of conscience knew that the Son of Man was right.

All the while there was standing on the marble steps that led up to the Holy of Holies, a group of Levites, scribes and Pharisees who knew what a heavy loss that stampede would cause the merchants and themselves. They saw that He who started it all was a carpenter from lowly Nazareth, with:

- ✓ no mark of office about him,
- ✓ no scrolls,
- ✓ no badge of dignity.

They were furious. How dare this obscure workingman with a few ill smelling fishermen assume authority within the Temple precincts, where they alone were masters? “What sign can you show us for doing this?” (2:18)

Now these were learned men, skilled in their own conceits. But before those who thought themselves wise, Our Blessed Lord was wiser. He would show to them a Wisdom,

- ✓ so deep,

- ✓ so profound,

- ✓ so revealing the truth of their Scriptures,

that not even they, the wise men of Israel, would comprehend.

In fact, what He said was so deep that it took them almost three years to figure it out. With a firm and solemn gesture

centered on Himself, He said something beyond their

comprehension. “Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (2:19)

Destroy this Temple?

- ✓ This Temple, they thought, on which Solomon had lavished his wealth!

- ✓ This Temple on which ten thousand workmen enrolled as they brought the cedars of Lebanon to its walls!

- ✓ This Temple with its fragrant wood, embroidered veils, precious stones and glittering roofs!
- ✓ This Temple which was 46 years in the building and was far from finished!

And this obscure Galilean would rebuild it in three days! . . .

They were not wise enough to understand the wisdom of God.

Our Blessed Lord did not mean that earthly Temple before them, but the Temple of His Body. But why call his Body a Temple? Because a Temple is the place where God dwells. What He really was saying is the actual Temple where God dwells is not that place of stone, for:

- ✓ I am the Holy of Holies.
- ✓ I am the son of the living God.
- ✓ I am the real temple of the Most High!

Will the worldly wise ever learn to imitate that beautiful tension between opposites? Will it go on dividing itself into the

- ✓ educated and uneducated,
- ✓ the literate and illiterate,

heaping praise on the so called wise who reject the Wisdom of God and criticize the simple who accept it? Or will the world someday, with the grace of Almighty God, realize the truest wisdom is being simple and the truest simplicity is being wise

with the Wisdom of God. It is easy to be one or the other but so difficult to be both. That's why it is easier to be anything but a good Christian. It is hard to be wise, and yet still be simple enough to want to be taught, and yet that is what is necessary to enter heaven. "Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." (MT 18:3)