

Commentary on the Readings for March 4, 2018

The Third Sunday of Lent

If we step back and look behind the words of the Readings for this Sunday, we might see that the theme of all the readings is "Guidelines and Values." Now you might say, "That's an unusual theme for scripture readings." Not really! The entire Bible directs us to particular goals, and it often warns us about alternative or distracting goals along the way; but the ultimate goal should always be to "*Seek the face of the Lord*" (*Psalms 27:8-9*). The ancient Jews used the concept of "face" to mean the *presence* of the Lord, and this could only be accomplished in the temple in Jerusalem. (**Please Note: Other Readings might be used for this Sunday if the new catechumens are present to take their first step toward Baptism and entry into the Catholic Church.**)

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of Exodus (20:1-17)*. This is the story of God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses. The first three commandments concern man's relationship with God. The remainder deal with man's relationship with neighbor, family, friends, etc. These are not only common sense rules, but they are guidelines to peaceful relations with God and Man. You might notice that the first three are in much detail while the rest are very brief. This is because God is to be worshipped in a special way because of who He is.

The **Responsorial Psalm (19:8-11)**. In this prayer, the psalmist is praising God for His laws, decrees and precepts, etc., recognizing them to be "more precious than gold" because they can guide us to eternal life and happiness.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians (1:22-25)*. Here Paul is explaining to the Corinthians (and to us) that most of the Jews could not accept Christ because He was nailed to a cross (or hung on a tree) which to them was the greatest disgrace. They couldn't see behind or beyond this act of self-sacrificing love. And the Gentiles dismissed it as foolishness. But we, the faithful, can see it for what it really is, the supreme offering of love and the redemption of all mankind.

The **Gospel Reading** is taken from the *Gospel of John (2:13-25)*. This is the familiar story of Jesus driving out of the temple those buying and selling animals and birds used in the sacrifices. The practice, although originally acceptable, was getting out of control and becoming more important than the temple and its main purpose. Jesus' actions enraged the sellers and temple rulers, and they demanded an explanation and a "sign." Jesus tells them, "[If you) destroy this temple, in three days I will raise it up." This was one of the statements used to accuse Jesus at His trial before Pilate, but we know He was speaking about the temple of His body, a value far greater than the temple building.

Today, we are fortunate that we don't have to bring birds or animals to church for the sacrifice. We have something far greater, but we still have to "keep holy the Sabbath Day." We should be bringing to church something far more important than animals or birds such as a contrite heart, a wounded heart, or perhaps a joyful heart of thanksgiving. Whatever it is, we should be aware of what we are giving to God at the offertory. What is it that you bring to church on Sunday? Something to think about during your prayer time this week! **MFB**