

**March 8, 2015**  
**Third Week of Lent Year B**  
**4:00 p.m. and 8:30 a.m. Homily**  
**Exod 20:1-17; 1 Cor 1:22-25, John 2:18-25**

In today's Gospel, Jesus went to the spectacularly beautiful temple and made a clear, unmistakable statement: "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace." He wasn't against the temple per se; Jesus objected to the desecration of the Holy Place by a marketplace mentality, one that took advantage of the poor.

Just as Jesus was angry and acted radically to eliminate injustice and greed, so also must the church follow His example to guard against practices that shut out or even discriminate against the poor. When we plan our programs and community celebrations, are we assuming that everyone has the resources to participate? Can everyone pay the fees and buy the books for PSR classes for their children? Are we making sure that tuition for our school is affordable for all? The care of the poor must be the primary responsibility of those who belong to Jesus rather than an afterthought.

Author and Scripture scholar Fr. Luke Timothy Johnson has offered one way of getting our priorities straight and alleviating the marketplace mentality. Johnson suggests that we compare the back of a typical Catholic church in America to the front of the church. In the front, all is orderly and correct. All of the furniture and art create an ambience of solemnity and reverence.

In the vestibule of the church, another world thrives. There we find the parish book of intercession, where people request prayers for their difficulties and sufferings, great and small. There, we find signup sheets for various trips, for donating flowers and volunteering for liturgical ministries. There too we find pamphlets on a variety of topics, and religious books and CDs for sale.

While the front of the church is concerned with the divine presence, morality, authority, proper procedure and liturgy, the back is given over to the nitty-gritty necessities of life.

In order to maintain the whole church as the Father's house and the place where the body of Christ, head and members, meets to pray, it's necessary to unite the front and back of the church in a creative tension so that each complements and transforms the other.

When Jesus appeared in the temple, his words and his presence were transformative. Moneychangers and sellers with their animals had no place in the Father's house. But he also used that moment to speak of another temple, the temple of his body. "Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up.

As one in whom the very presence of God dwelled, Jesus could readily call himself a temple. At the beginning of his Gospel, John told his readers that Jesus, the Word of God, became flesh and dwelt among us. But a better translation would be "pitched his tent among us." The Hebrew word for tent is *shakein*, which shares the same root as the word *shekinah*, the term used for the divine presence in the Hebrew scriptures. In Jesus, this God came to us in flesh and blood, in time and space.

Jesus' words also remind each of us that we, too, are temples, holy places where God has chosen to take up residence. Just as the Jerusalem temple was cleansed of a marketplace mentality, so do we as living temples have to focus not on the transitory but on the transcendent, not on ourselves but on God and on those God puts in our way to love and serve.