

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR B 2021

The temple was a very holy site to the Jews from of old. From the time of the great Solomon, the temple had been a place of prayer, pilgrimage and sacrifice. It had undergone multiple attacks, desecrations, destructions and reconstructions. The temple at Jesus' time was the second one that Herod had built which was eventually destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

It was here that Mary and Joseph had presented their Son Jesus to the Father and they were met by Simeon and Anna. It was in this temple that Mary and Joseph found their twelve-year-old after he had gotten lost. It was here that Jesus preached and prayed always. Since many pilgrims came to this holy site to fulfill the prescriptions of the law and to offer the sacrifices, many local traders thought it an ideal place for business selling animals for sacrifices and changing money.

So, this time too Jesus returns to Jerusalem and He rightfully becomes angry at the sight of such chaos of trading in His Father's house. It was supposed to be a universal house of prayer "for all the nations" where every man or woman on earth would find a place to pray. With zeal for His Father's house consuming Him, He cleansed the temple of irreverence. Secondly, there was profiteering, cheating and dishonesty from the money changers who exploited the pilgrims. That's why He kicked them out of God's house.

All those money changers and Jewish pilgrims were familiar with the Ten Commandments which we heard in the 1st reading and yet they went about breaking them. The first three go into great detail about how to respect and revere our God. When we value our relationship with our God, everything else falls into place. The other commandments concern the love and care for the neighbor which are equally important including: "Though shall not steal." Yet because they rejected them, the Temple was destroyed, the poor and the gentiles ignored and the Messiah among them was condemned to death. What kind of people are these? Jesus condemned their religiosity.

A story is told of a priest who was coming back to his rectory one evening in the dark only to be accosted by a robber who pulled a gun at him and demanded, "Your money or your life!" As the priest reached his hand into his coat pocket the robber saw his Roman collar and said, "So you are a priest? Then you can go." The priest was rather surprised at this unexpected show of mercy and so tried to reciprocate by offering the robber his packet of cigarettes, to which the robber replied, "No, Father, I don't smoke during Lent." You can see how this robber is trying to keep the pious observance of not smoking during Lent while forgetting the more fundamental commandment of God, "Thou shall not steal." Do we carry a similar attitude? I do not care how I treat others as long as I come to Church.

We too live in a world where the commandments of God are broken every day and the Sacred profaned. The line between right and wrong is getting more and more blurred in these times where we want to be politically correct in what we say and do and we don't want to offend anybody. During this season of Lent, let us reflect on our lives and turn over some tables of injustice and irreverence in God's house. Let us promise to honor the Sacred.

Let us also resolve to love our parish church and use it well as we welcome all people. We should also be reverent in it especially before, during and after our Masses, so that Jesus may not need to make a whip to remind us. Let us make it a holier place by adding our personal prayers to our parish worship and offering our time and talents in the various ministries.

St. Paul teaches us that we are God's temples because the Spirit of God dwells in us. Hence, we should not desecrate God's temples, our bodies by our pride, impurity, injustice, hatred, jealousy, laziness etc... Let us cleanse our temples by asking for God's forgiveness through the sacrament of reconciliation

Through prayers and faithfulness to the divine commandments and the gospel values, may we rededicate ourselves to the Lord as the new temples of God where He takes priority. Amen.