

## Homily; 3rd Sunday of Lent; Cycle B

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Simply by living in the world we have come to know over the past twelve (12) months or so, it seems like we've been observing Lent for quite some time now. I think we've all been more prayerful ... and without even trying, we've been more sacrificial.

A few weeks ago we observed Ash Wednesday and our Lenten practice of prayer, sacrifice and almsgiving began in a more meaningful and sincere way. While the manner in which we received our ashes was a little different, the blessing remained the same, "***Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.***"

Here we are now, starting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Lent and we see in today's Gospel ... Jesus is doing all He can to purify the ***Temple*** in Jerusalem.

For the Old Testament Jews, this Temple was everything...the center of their lives. ***But, most importantly***, the ***Temple*** was the ***dwelling place of God***; the place where God was present on Earth, the place where He desired peace and harmony between Himself and His chosen people.

But the Prophets remind us...corruption entered the Temple and it was a place where false gods were also worshipped. There was a tension between the beauty of what the Temple was supposed to be...and the compromised condition the Temple had become. And because of this, the expectation of a faithful Jew was always that the ***Messiah*** would come and purify the Temple.

And that's what we see in today's Gospel...Jesus, not a radical, not a revolutionary, not an activist...but rather Jesus...***the Messiah***, upon entering the Temple, made a whip out of cords, and drove out everything ***and*** everyone that compromised the Temple...cleansing it and returning it to the place of prayer it was intended to be.

Keep that thought in mind for a moment...and let's look at the writings of St. Paul...a man who knew all that a faithful Jew should know about the Temple. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians; "***Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...?***" (1 Corinthians 6:19)

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This is not something that's said in casual conversation, but rather this is an foundational statement; St. Paul knew the importance of the Temple, but he says... our bodies are the Temple...our bodies are *the dwelling place of God*. He's telling us God dwells within each one of us...St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans goes on and writes, "...*offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God...*"

(Romans 12:1)

When we embrace these words of St. Paul and recognize that each one of us is, at the same time, both the temple *and* the sacrifice, it is then that we are signaling our desire to be one with God, to be that soul where Divinity and humanity live in peace.

Now, take a moment...& merge this image of the *Temple cleansed* by Jesus with the image of our body being the *temple* described by St. Paul.

If our body, *our very life*, is meant to be a temple where God is praised, then every aspect of our life needs to be directed to Him...our thoughts, words, deeds, our work, our friendships, our entertainment, recreation and our rest ... everything we do *is offered to God*.

Now...I want to take you to a third image, the image of my garage. I think it looks OK...for a garage. My wife & I have lived in this home for six years now and in general, *everything* in the garage is where it belongs...except there are a few areas of clutter, boxes that have sat there for six (6) years ... boxes that I've opened, looked inside, then closed back up and said, "*I'll deal with this later*" and then I go on and do something else because getting the garage to the point where it looks great, will take a lot of time and hard work, and just too difficult to deal with.

I think that's what happens to our souls sometimes. We look inside, things generally look OK, but we don't like everything we see, there's clutter. A soul can be like the garage, we know it needs to be cleaned up, but it's going to take time & hard work, sometimes it's the kind of work we really don't want to do, so we say, "*I will get to it later...but later never comes.*" And we know that's true because we go to Confession time after time and we confess the same sins over and over again but we don't take the time, we don't do the really hard work and we say, "*I'll get to it later... but later never comes.*"

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And that's the point of today's Gospel...Lent *is the time* to plead with Jesus to cleanse the temple of our bodies. Lent is the time to begin the spring cleaning of our soul. Implore Jesus to rid our souls of those things that bring us to the near occasion of sin. Like the Temple in Jerusalem, let Him knock some things over and drive them out of the temple of our bodies. Let Him make such a *big mess* that it needs to be cleaned up...*right now*...just like the mess He made in the Temple in Jerusalem, to free it from corruption and turn it back into the place where God can dwell in peace.

We don't have far to go to find our guide for spring cleaning, because we can use our first reading today from the Book of Exodus...let's do a quick review:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment; this is our most basic sin, making something that is less than God into God, things like Pride, Power, Wealth & Honor.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment; How we use God's name forms how we and others think about God. Are we using God's name in a way that's both holy & respectfully?
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment; Keep the Sabbath holy...we live in a society that makes it very hard to keep this commandment, a society that seems to worship God less and less each year; and if we allow it, this secular society will kill our soul.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment; Ask yourself...are we honoring God as a family should?
- The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment; I am fairly certain none of us are murdering others, but ask yourself...do I give life or do I take life away? Do I drain people of the joy of life or do I encourage others as a source of life, hope & joy.
- The 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment; Do not commit adultery.
- The 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment; Do not steal. This commandment pertains to our work, school, family and friends. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us... gossiping is stealing the reputation of another.
- The 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment; Do not bear false witness. I immediately thought of our election process and the untruths or the partial truths candidates say about one another. Their example does not give us license to bear false witness also! Ask yourself, can I go just one day without saying something negative about someone else?

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- The 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Commandments; We can look at these two coveting commandments together. We should never compare ourselves with others, rather we should compare ourselves to who we were yesterday. Ask if we're making progress in the spiritual realm, if we're making progress in becoming the person *we* want to be, the person ***God wants us to be?***

Once we have taken the time and done the hard work of opening these last few boxes, let the Messiah loose in our soul to purify the temple of our body so that it becomes a place that is pleasing to God, a place where ***He will find*** peace and harmony. It starts with a commitment of time and hard work, followed by a sincere examination of conscience and it continues right back there in the Confessional.

When the last few unopened boxes of our soul are cleared away and we become a place where ***God will dwell in peace and harmony***, we will then be prepared for that moment of everlasting joy when, “***...unto dust we shall return!***”