

## **REFLECTION FOR 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR B**

**Exodus 20:1-17 1Cor 1:22-25 John 2:13-25**

Many of us have special churches in our lives, as soon as we walk in, we feel enveloped by God's presence.

Maybe it's the church of your childhood where you were baptised and received your first Holy Communion, or where you got married. You walk in and immediately you sense that you are in the presence of God.

What would happen if your favourite beautiful church building you have always loved was destroyed by fire or suddenly gone? Could you pray elsewhere? Sure, but you will feel that you have lost something very important.

Sacred spaces are important to us. We need them and so we are naturally protective of them.

In today's Gospel, Jesus goes to the sacred place for the ancient Jewish people. The temple was the centre of Jewish faith. The temple was the place where they were certain of one thing: God is here.

The physical presence of the temple building was a promise that God was always present in the midst of the people. They placed their most sacred objects in the temple: the Ark of the Covenant, the Tablets containing the Ten Commandments.

The temple was like a physical promise from God: I am with you and I am here for you.

When Jesus went to the Temple, he found people doing a lot of trading activities there, the Temple was almost like a market. The sacred Temple was in a mess. So, Jesus drove them all out of the Temple and knocked their tables over.

I knew a man who seemed to be constantly angry and whenever anyone challenged him about his constant anger, he would say "If it was okay for Jesus to make a whip and knock over the money changers and sellers' things in the temple and throw them out of the temple, then it is okay for me to be angry sometimes too".

He justified his angry feelings by saying if Jesus had righteous anger then his anger is righteous too.

But have you ever noticed? Angry people are often very impatient with other people's anger. They convince themselves that their anger is perfectly acceptable, but others' anger is always unreasonable.

It was easy enough to buy animals for sacrifice outside the Temple at a very reasonable price, but any animal offered in sacrifice must be without blemish. There were official inspectors of the animals, and it was to all intents and purposes certain that they would reject an animal bought outside and would direct the worshipper to the Temple stalls and booths which were owned by the high priests and the Temple officials, and they inflated the prices of the animals.

Also, every Jew had to pay a Temple tax and this tax had to be paid with the Temple money. When pilgrims and ordinary people exchanged their money for Temple money in order to

pay their Temple tax, the exchange rate was terrible and ordinary people of modest means had to pay so much more just to fulfil their religious duties. It lent itself to exploitation and money changers made large profits out of it.

It was not simply that the buying and selling interfered with the dignity and solemnity of worship; it was that the very worship of the house of God was being used to exploit the worshippers. It was the passion for social justice which burned in Jesus' heart when he took this drastic step.

So, when Jesus overturns these money changers tables, Jesus is overturning the tools of injustice, knocking over the corrupt system which kept the poor *poorer* in ancient Israel. Jesus, by his action in the Temple, overturns abuses which trap people in poverty.

Jesus, by his action, was cleansing the mess in the Temple and ending the exploitation that was taking place in the Temple.

The Temple had lost its way; it was no longer serving God's purpose but was at the service of various human purposes.

We can all lose our way. We can all end up serving our own purpose rather than God's purpose.

Every so often we need to hear a prophetic voice calling us back to God's way. For us as Christians, the most authoritative prophetic voice is the voice of Jesus which we hear above all in the gospels. We need to keep returning to his voice, to his living word, as it comes to us through the Scriptures, so that we can live our lives in keeping with God's purpose.

We need to remember that we are God's temples, body and soul, because the Spirit of God dwells in us. Therefore, we have no right to desecrate God's temple by acts of impurity, injustice, pride, hatred, jealousy and all evil thoughts, desires, and plans.

Let us use this season of Lent to clean up all the mess in our lives. Let us welcome Jesus into our hearts and lives during Lent, by repentance and the renewal of our lives.

We need to love our parish Church and use it. Our Church is the place where we come together as a community to love and praise God. It is the holy place where we gather strength to support one another in the task of living the Gospel. It is the place where we come privately to enter into intimate conversation with God. In this building, many prodigal sons and daughters have experienced the merciful and loving Lord. In this building, tears have been shed by those in pain and grief. Let's look around our Church this morning and treasure it. Let us remember this: any time we enter this church or pass by, it should remind you of God's promise: I am with you and I am here for you.

In all things, may we Christians fill our lives with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise. And the God of peace will be with us.

Fr Patrick