

3rd (QA&SJ) Sunday of Lent Year B

On the First Sunday of Lent we heard about Jesus engaged in battle with the devil. Last Sunday he was on the mountain transfigured in front of his startled disciples. This Sunday's Gospel he is in the temple. Like the desert and the mountain, the temple is a place of special encounter with God. Today we did not see our Lord's glorious face but his fuming anger towards the traders and money changers. Jesus is concerned because the Temple worship no longer reflects God's original idea of a worshipping community. He told those who were selling the doves *"Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"* His disciples remembered that it was written, *"Zeal for your house will consume me."* *What is this zeal about?*

Zeal is an *intense enthusiasm, a love and passion*. In the words of Psalm 69:10, quoted in today's Gospel, *zeal is like a fire within that consumes the person*. Zeal is like jealousy; it eats up the person. In the first reading, the Lord describes himself as a *'jealous God.'* This might surprise us, but the bible resorts to the image of love and marriage, where jealousy is an attending emotion, to show that God cannot bear the unfaithfulness or the indifference of his people. There should be no other god that should rival the Lord. He must be loved with one's heart, mind, and soul with one's entire being.

The cleansing of the temple was not just a case of implementing a law or a cleanliness drive for Jesus. It was a genuine zeal for his Father's house. It is rare that Jesus really got angry. He *"lost his cool."* *Is it right to be angry? Is there such a thing as righteous anger or healthy anger?* Yes, if you get angry in defense of what is good, and for the rights of others, *and not just to get even or to cover up for your insecurities, it's okay.* There are things that are proper to particular occasions or situations. Summer shorts and undershirts may be cool, but they are not proper in an office or a church. Texting is a good way to communicate, but while driving is not proper. Chewing gum while flying to keep your ears from getting plugged is good but in the church it makes you look like a goat. An ungrateful person is not proper before God. Evil thoughts and plans are not proper for a decent person. Jesus has an eye for what is proper and has the courage to cleanse the temple. He is passionate and uncompromising when it comes to doing his Father's will. We should have the same passion in doing God's will, and clean out ourselves of our indifference and complacency. Sad to say, we spend a lot of our time just deciding whether we are for God or against God.

If Jesus visits our church today, would He still recognize the church He founded, would he feel at home? Would he be happy with how we treat each other? God's love is open for all and none of us has a monopoly on the truth, and none of us can claim an exclusive right to

preach the Good News. We take pride in being Catholics. But in our day-to-day life, we often take the demands of our faith for granted and reduce our religion to a status symbol—*much like a pin that members of an organization wear to set themselves apart from others.*

Jesus is not satisfied with our lip service. We may be trying to keep the pious observance of our faith, customs, and traditions and forget the more fundamental commandments of God *to love Him with our whole heart, soul and strength and our neighbors as ourselves.* As Jesus cleanses the temple of those who make use of religion to do business, so Jesus speaks to us. He wants us to purify our love for him. *Have we ever “turned our Father’s house into a market place?”* We have if we considered it as just some kind of center of mechanical worship, offering of masses *without real communities of love and true spirit of caring.* Lent is a fitting time to catch a spark from the fiery zeal of our Lord. It’s an ideal season for *values clarification.* *Jesus continues to call us to repentance and conversion. But how many of us have been contented with window-dressing our hearts instead of changing ourselves from within as to our motives, attitudes and desires?* While there is still time left, let us listen to our Lord’s words with our hearts and not with our ears, lest we miss the meaning he intends for us.

Every Sunday as a community we gather and celebrate the Eucharist to thank God for the week that has passed. Every Lord’s Day should be

like a step on the way up to heaven - but *is it?* *We are wise in the ways of the world but how do we fare in church?* Of the 168 hours we have to spend each week, for many of us one at best is spent in the sanctuary, the others in the business of the world. That may be our most telling commentary on the location of our treasure and our heart. Jesus reminds us what true worship entails. Worship means, *translating our words into actions modeled on His love*. For too many it is just a pause between duties and not even the pause that refreshes. It is not enough to just worship in the church, less so to offer lip service. The spirit of praising God must be taken to heart and concretized in a *life of caring and service*. Our zealotry in our Sunday worship has to extend beyond the walls of this church— that is in loving service to our neighbors in whose faces we see the face of Jesus. Let the concluding words of our Holy Mass challenge us. *'Ite missa est.'* *Go, you are sent. Amen.*