

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT – MARCH 4, 2018

In today's Gospel, Jesus cleanses God's temple of people who have turned it into a marketplace. In the Old Testament, the temple was seen as the visible sign of God's presence among his people. It was God's house, the place where his people could meet him, plead with him, and praise him.

It was here that Mary and Joseph had presented their Son to the Lord and were greeted by Simeon and Anna. It was here that Mary and Joseph found their twelve-year-old Son. It was here that Jesus preached and prayed. Since many pilgrims came to this holy site to fulfill prescriptions of the law and to offer sacrifice, local merchants thought it an ideal location for doing business – changing money and selling sheep, oxen and birds for ritual sacrifices.

On this occasion, near Passover, Jesus again returns to Jerusalem and becomes rightfully angry at the sight of such commerce and chaos in his Father's house. He drives out the merchants and animals, spills the money and overturns tables. It must have been quite a sight! How had such a holy place been turned into a marketplace?

The Temple in Jerusalem was built as a house where God's glory would dwell in the midst of his people. The sacredness was compromised by the buyers and sellers. Jesus' zeal to restore its sacredness leads him to clear the Temple. When the side of Jesus was pierced on Calvary, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The place of worship is no longer the Temple in Jerusalem; now, it is through the pierced side of Christ that we have access to the Father.

When the Jews asked for a sign for acting the way he did, Jesus responded: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Later on, the disciples understood that Jesus was talking about the temple of his own body.

After the disciples experienced the tragic death of Jesus on the Cross and became witnesses of his Resurrection, the Holy Spirit filled their minds and hearts with light and they were able to look back at all they had experienced with Jesus in a new light. They began to understand that they were now part of the Body of Christ. We have been incorporated into the Body of Christ by our baptism.

St. Paul would say that we are the temple of God. And in fact a Christian is ought to be the temple of God, the dwelling place of God. How much more then should we keep the sanctity of our lives! Indeed all who were baptized in him became his new and dynamic followers and disciples. The Christian community, then, is the new temple; it is the place of our meeting with God, where we feel good, are both challenged and supported, where we hear God's words more clearly and where we are more ready to respond to God's call.

The Church teaches that every baptized Christian is called to bear witness to the name of Jesus, through his/her personal experience of Jesus. This calling does not necessarily mean going out of one's own town, but one can very well remain in his/her own milieu at home, in the work-place, etc. It may be the life-situation of an individual that God uses to call him/her to action.

God continues to call whomever He wills for his mission; he calls each of us by name, he invites us, to come and see. A person who is called is ever free to choose yes or no, and thereby to choose happiness or misery, or to choose to be a person of God or not.

Accepting His invitation to be part of His mission in one way or another will certainly lead a person find meaning to his/her life, where he/she will experience the Lord's love, and be happy. As we continue our celebration of the Mass, let us ask God to help us ponder the implications of this for our lives as we recognize ourselves, and every person we meet, as temples where God resides.