

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT, B  
THE TEMPLE, THE CHURCH AND OUR BODY

*“Take all this out of here and stop turning My Father’s House into a market”  
(Jn. 2: 16)*

***The Jesus that we have here today is not “The familiar Jesus”***, who is compassionate, forgiving, embracing, affable and loving. Here we have a very angry Jesus, Who goes beyond words and scolding to “making a whip with some cord” to drive out people from the Temple. St. John describes the incident thus: “Making a whip out of some cord, He drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers’ coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon sellers, ‘Take all this out of here and stop turning My Father’s House into a market’” (Jn. 2: 15-16). He was violent! But why?

***Why did Jesus get this angry? What could have made Him so “mad”?*** The Temple was the most important building and institution in Jewish life. It was the place where God dwells especially among His people. It was that sacred component in Jewish life. It was a place where God revealed Himself through the teachings of the Scripture, instructions on the Law and interpretation of the prophets. It was a place of worship, where people could connect with God in worship. The visit of Jesus on this day revealed an entirely different scenario of desecration and commercialization. Jesus could not condone this. He immediately stood up against such desecrating practices in the temple. So He shouted out: *“My house shall be called a house of prayer. But you have made it into a den of robbers”*, He shouted out (Matthew 21: 13). The people failed to understand the difference between the sacred and the secular; the consecrated and the profane. They failed to acknowledge and relate with the temple as a sacred space. The actions of the people – buying and selling – were not fulfilling any of the roles of the Temple.

***The Temple and The Church:*** This should make us think of our relationship with the Church today as well. God is truly present everywhere but God is especially present in the Church – because it is a place consecrated, dedicated and designated for the worship of God, like the Temple. The Church is thus a place where we encounter God in so many extraordinary ways. In Exodus 3: 5 God ordered Moses: *remove the shoes from your feet. For the place on which you stand is holy ground.* This was a sign of reverence demanded by God Himself. In the presence of God, there must be significant reverence. Similarly, the Church as the House of God should be

revered as a place of worship and adoration of God. It is not a theatre, not a stadium; it is not a lecture hall, it is not an auditorium, neither is it a dining, where we can eat kinds of stuff. Each time we gather we are a congregation, not an audience nor a cheering crowd. A congregation is “an assembly of persons brought together for common religious worship”. So we congregate to worship and to pray. This is what the Jews failed to realise, just like many of us. What is the Church to us? How do we relate to it?

***Fulfilment of the Prophets:*** There are further explanations for this action of Jesus: Jesus’ action was a fulfilment of the prophecies of Jeremiah, Malachi and Zechariah. He is the Lord Who has come to purify the Temple, banish the merchants, and restore it as a house of prayer. The Jew had been defiling the temple right from the time of these prophets by carrying out corrupt practices of making money from the animals they were selling for ritual sacrifices. They rigidly interpreted the law that these animals could not be purchased with Roman coins hence the presence of money-changers at the precincts of the temple. Jeremiah had denounced the emptiness of the kind of worship the Jews offered to God in the temple (Jeremiah 7: 1-15). Malachi on his part had prophesied that a time will come when the Lord will suddenly enter into His temple (Malachi 3: 1). Zechariah had foreseen a time when there would be no more traders in the house of the Lord (Zechariah 14: 21). This was “the time.” Jesus does not come to destroy the Temple and the Law, but to fulfil them and to reveal their true purpose (Matt. 5: 17).

***The Temple, My Body:*** Jesus leads us to a deeper understanding of the Temple when He refers to the Temple as His Body. By so doing, Jesus presents to His Jewish listeners and us the gift of the sacrifice of His Body on the Cross as the highest and most perfect sacrifice we can ever offer to God. With this, we no longer need the offerings of oxen, sheep, or doves. These are no longer capable of taking away sins. (cf. Heb. 10: 1-18). Jesus’ body, destroyed on the Cross and raised in the Third Day is the New Sanctuary, The New Temple. This surely transcends our idea of the Church from the physical blocks that make the house to a spiritual entity that is our bodies. The Church is the people, the community, the worshipping assembly. Each of us constitutes a Church in sense of being configured into Christ at baptism. St. Paul teaches the same theology to his converts in Corinth when he affirms rhetorically: *Do you not know that you are the Temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives within you?* (1Cor. 3: 16). Since indeed we are temples of God, the Body of Christ, the Church, and because it is expected that we should revere the Church

as the place where God is extraordinarily present, it follows as a matter of fact, that we should regard our bodies with utmost respect and dignity. Do we think our bodies might need cleansing as well? Are there things that we need to “take away”, “banish”, “turn over” and “whip out” from our bodies? Note that the body here is used to embrace both the whole man – body and soul.

***Dear friends,*** by the Decalogue, God instructs us to be friends and in harmony with our neighbours. Let us respond to the Commandments as a gift of love and freedom rather than restrictions and traps; let us embrace the Cross in an uncomplaining manner and offer it to Christ in His Passion; let us bear in mind that our bodies are created in the of God as His Temple, where the Holy Spirit dwells and saved by Christ.