

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
Year B: Ex 20:1-17; Ps 19; Jn 2:13-25
March 7, 2021
Fr. David Pignato

The report from the Gospel of Our Lord's cleansing of the temple begins by telling us that "*the Passover of the Jews was near.*" The Passover was the most important religious feast for the people of the Old Testament, because it celebrated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. And according to the law of Moses, every male Israelite had to appear before the Lord during the days of Passover, which led to the custom of going to the temple in Jerusalem. Every Israelite also had to make a Passover sacrifice to God, either an ox or a sheep, for the wealthy, or two pigeons for those who were poor. But only temple currency was accepted, because other currencies were considered impure, because they bore the image of pagan rulers. This meant that pagan monies had to be exchanged into the temple currency, before the purchases could be made for the sacrifices. Thus, the tables with money changers in the outer courtyard of the temple, and we all know that money is always exchanged for a profit.

You can imagine the crowds of people around the temple at the time of Passover. There must have been great traffic and noise and filth. And yet, the temple in Jerusalem was the holiest place on earth for the Jewish People, because in its inner sanctuary was the Ark of the Covenant which contained the fragments of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, which we heard recited in the first reading from the Book of Exodus. This was the closest God had come to man, the most tangible presence of God on earth. And so, the Jews revered the temple above all else – it was where they believed God was dwelling on earth. But yet, they still tolerated all this business activity of trade at the place that was supposed to be a peaceful place of prayer, a place where minds and hearts were raised to God and sacrifices were offered as true worship.

So, we can understand why Jesus was so angry – righteously angry – when He saw how the temple was used. Jesus, we know, was the true Presence of God on earth. He was the eternal and divine Son of God made man, and so He was the true temple of God, as He said, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" He was rightfully angry to see how the holiest place of worship had become a marketplace, and the focus had shifted away from worshipping God.

Imagine if you came into this church of St. Julie's and the first thing you saw by the main door were tables set up where you had to change your money in

order to buy offerings that you could then bring up here to the altar, all before you could go find a seat where you could sit and pray. Of course, people up here at the altar and throughout the church would be hearing all the noise and commotion from people trying to conduct business back there at the door. It would be a circus, and it obviously wouldn't be the peaceful place of prayer that it now is, where souls can focus on God and reflect on their lives. It would defeat the very purpose of the church as a sanctuary from the noisy world, where we can lift our souls to God.

This is why Jesus was so angry when He saw the commotion and trade in the temple, and so *“He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, ‘Take these out of here, and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.’”*

What is the spiritual lesson of this dramatic event for us? Well, Jesus is the new and true Presence of God on earth, so He replaced the temple as the new place of worship. And after He ascended into Heaven, He left His Real Presence here on earth in the Holy Eucharist, which is His Body and Blood, under the disguise of bread and wine. After so many centuries, some people still ask, *“Do you Catholics really believe the Eucharist is actually the Body and Blood of Christ?”* And the answer of the Church is always, *“Yes, we really believe it, because Christ Our Lord told us it is so.”*

And this is why we treat and handle the Eucharist with such reverence and respect, it's why we genuflect when we enter the church or pass in front of the tabernacle, and it's why we should never receive it unworthily, if we are conscious of serious sin that has not been confessed and absolved. The Holy Eucharist is the True Presence of God on earth, it is the holiest thing on earth, and it therefore deserves our true and sincere worship. Jesus drove the merchants and money changers out of the temple because they were not respecting the temple as a place of worship and prayer. Their goal was not to honor and worship God, but to make a profit. When we come to church and approach the altar to receive Christ in the Eucharist, we should make sure that our purpose and intention is nothing other than to worship the God we love, because we know how much He loves us. This is true worship, and it's the right and proper goal for every Catholic Christian.