

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT, MARCH 6 & 7, 2021

Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

Dear brothers and sisters,

When asked for a sign for what he did in the temple. Our Lord gave this response - "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). What did he do? He cleansed the temple. When Jesus came to the temple, he found, seated in the temple, money changers and those who sold oxen , sheep and doves. Jesus "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." (john 2:15-16)]

Why is this important? Was it a mere springtime cleaning of the closets? Was it a simple rearrangement of furniture because the temple area was very busy and needed decluttering, perhaps to avoid fire hazards? No. The Lord gave this reason, "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace' (John 2:15-16). The Apostles saw in this action a reference to the Passion Psalm, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Psalm 69:10). This veiled hint to the coming suffering for the Lord became more pronounced when the Lord himself said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Scripture insightfully remarks that the temple meant here was the temple of the Lord's body" (John 2:21). This dawned on the Apostles after the Lord's crucifixion death and resurrection. The Lord's redemptive death and resurrection cast a radiant light on all he said and did.

Responding to the questions raised at the beginning of this homily. What was at stake when the Lord cleaned up the temple was not a mere surface or spring cleaning nor rearrangement of furniture for aesthetic or safety reasons. It has a deep spiritual significance. The

three synoptic gospels, confirming what we find in the gospel according to Saint John, noted our Lord's reference to universal purpose of the temple, "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7). "But you have made it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46). Hence, the then prevailing custom that made the court of gentiles a marketplace was contrary to God's purpose for the temple as the place of encounter with all his children. Our Lord took the action he did "To remove whatever obstacles there may be to the common recognition and worship of God - and thereby open up a space for common worship."

In order to break down the walls of division among men and create one worldwide family of God's people, Our Lord let himself be lifted on the cross and laid down his life. He said, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself"(John 12:52). Reflecting on this, St Paul writes, "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both Jews and gentiles one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh" (Ephesians 2:13-14).

70 A.D witnessed the destruction of the magnificent temple of God in Jerusalem where animal sacrifices were offered daily. The Lord's Thanksgiving sacrifice called Eucharist replaced the holocaust offering. That is the holy Mass. In accordance with the teaching of the rabbis when the Messiah comes all other sacrifices will cease except the *todah* , thanksgiving sacrifice.

How does this tie in with the first and second readings, and the responsorial Psalm ? The first reading tells of the God's gift of the Decalogue, otherwise known as the Ten Commandments to his people on their arrival at Mount Sinai. This is so that it might go well with them in the Promised Land. To afford God's people an everlasting remembrance of the Decalogue, the Lord commanded them to build an Ark into which the tablets of stone upon which the Ten Commandments were written were to be kept. When the temple was

built, Ark of the Commandments was kept in an innermost sanctuary called holy of the holies. The Ark became the priceless occupant of the temple. "Through the Decalogue, God prepared man for friendship with himself and for harmony with his neighbor. This was to man's advantage, since God needed nothing from man. This raised man to glory, for it gave him what he did not have, friendship with God.

The Lord Jesus is both the Word of God and the Temple. To listen to Jesus is to follow the law and the prophets. He has the words of everlasting life (John 6:68). Though a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ Jesus is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1Corinthians 1:23-24). We can say with the Psalmist that the law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple" (Psalm 19:8-9). This is because the Lord is one with his law.

Because we are the Body of Christ, we are his temple. May we let the king of glory into our hearts and souls and cleanse the temple of his body and remove any obstacle that hinders right worship.