

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Lent

March 3-4, 2018

Readings: Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians: 1:22-25; John 2: 13-25

Preacher: Sr. Joan Sobala

What are we to make of this scene in today's Gospel? It will certainly be remembered by the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day as a significant cause for Jesus' death.

But how about us here today? Do we stand at a distance and view this scene as on a DVD? Or shall we walk with Jesus ... up the royal steps... across the open courtyard to stand next to Jesus at the entrance to the Court of Gentiles, that is, as far as non-Jews can go.

At first glance, standing there beside Jesus, we might be unaware of the inappropriateness of what we see and hear and smell. It seems like an ordinary market to us.

That's the problem. The Court of Gentiles had become an ordinary market. Oxen and sheep are herded in so that the wealthy can buy them for sacrifice and there are doves for the poor to purchase. Everything costs more when purchased in the Temple, but purchase inside the temple precincts was required, even for the poor. Haggling goes on. Deals are struck and thieves make out very well. The money-changers hand over acceptable shekels for the hated Roman coins and money from foreign lands. The noise is constant and intense.

Maybe our reaction to what we experience, standing next to Jesus, is distasteful, but we shrug our shoulders. Let someone else deal with this mess. It has nothing to do with me, and we would pass it by if we could, as we pass by litter strewn along a highway.

On the other hand, we might not know what to think as we stand there with Jesus. But He knows what to think and how to act. Jesus moves through the court

of Gentiles with all the energy of a vigorous man in his prime, quickly creating frenzy among the bigger animals, toppling tables and flinging coins to the floor.

Jesus knows there will be consequences for his actions, but Jesus would not waver.

He does not waver as our savior either. He wants us, loves us, welcomes us as the father in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son welcomed his son home—with a wide embrace. Jesus invites us to cleanse the temple of our own lives as we move toward Holy Week and Easter.

We get an important clue about cleansing the temple of our lives from the first reading from Exodus. There, on the mountain, God had given the people what we have come to know as the Ten Commandments—a design for all of us to weave into our lives so that we may begin to be all God calls us to be, before God and with one another. Somehow, we think that the Commandments are the most that we are asked to do. Not true. Not true. They are the minimum—the basic ingredients of life with God. Virtue, goodness, justice and compassion are built on these commandments, but the Commandments themselves are foundational, not the pinnacle of what we can be with and for God and one another.

What more is there to be and do to become an Easter people? For one thing, consider what and who have we invited into our temple? Of all that we've welcomed, do any distract us from faith, compassion, justice and love? Have our hearts and minds been renewed in worship or is it rote activity? Do we understand and engage the Commandments as a path to right relationships in our daily lives, as a way of keeping our inner temple holy? Can we become quiet inside? Shut off and shut out, at least some time each day the phones and computer enticements that absorb us? Do we find surprise and gratitude within us as we live in the embrace of God?

If we are called to cleanse our own inner lives, we likewise have a responsibility to cleanse the culture in which we live—to press for diminishing gun violence, graft, greed, and all those things that render our world less than a place where God can be found and worshipped.

What does Jesus see and do as He stands at the entrance of our personal temples? In the holy places of our world?