

3rd Sunday of Lent 3-7-2021

Stop making my father's house a marketplace.”

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus. In a particular kingdom, there was a painter, and this painter painted a picture of Jesus crucified - beautifully he had painted. On a particular special occasion, this painter wanted to present this picture to the king, with the caption in the picture, “The king reigns from the throne of the cross, is he also reigning from the throne of your lives?” Presenting the same picture to the king, he also mentioned, “Dear King, I would like you to keep this picture in a most prominent place.” Hearing the request of the painter, all the ministers were very much baffled and bewildered about how the king is going to respond to the painter. Suddenly the king rose from his throne and ordered all the ministers to remove the throne from its regular place and place this picture in the place of the throne. Because hereafter it is Christ who is going to reign in the kingdom, and he should be the center of this palace, and in all our hearts as well. Yes, my dear sisters and brothers. The king felt that Christ is the king of all the kings and he should be honored. He should be respected above everyone. That is why we again hear from the Old Testament, when Jonah went to the place of Nineveh, he preached to the people of Nineveh, telling them to repent and come to the Lord. Hearing the words of Jonah, the king said to all the people of Nineveh - making a decree - that the people, together with the animals and the cattle should wear sackcloth and put on ashes and repent for everyone's sin. The king really felt who is primary in their own hearts.

Today Jesus comes with the same decree, telling to the people, the Jews and the Scribes, “Stop making my father's house a marketplace.” He felt that his house should be a place of prayer. His house should be primarily a place for God, not for any other extracurricular activities.

I remember when I was a child studying in the fifth or sixth grade, I had to walk almost 2 miles to the parish church. In the early morning we often went, some of our friends together, and then we were seated just before the altar. But because of our walking and coming for 2 miles, people got little bit excited and they were talking just before the Mass as the priest started the Eucharist. I did not speak, but some of my friends were just making some noise there, and the priest got really wild and just came and slapped **me**. I was just wondering why he slapped me, because I did not speak. Perhaps he misunderstood. But I felt what needs to be, keeping the sense of sacredness in the church. And again, as I was growing, I also associated what this sacredness means. People used to go to their own fields early in the morning. As they walk to their fields, they have to cross across the church. As they cross across the church, they will remove their sandals. They remove their sandals, take them in their hands, and go to the other side of the church, then put their sandals on again and go. When I inquired what this means they said, “This is a sacred place.” You don't feel you should even wear your

sandals before the sacredness of God and the primacy of God. That is how many people felt about what a sense of sacredness means.

I have seen also a priest who just went for a visit to a particular parish in the evening hours. Sometimes people come to the church premises and then they sit and talk. The priest used to be very, very strict and used to tell them, come to the church, definitely, to pray, to be with God, to come to meet the priest – do not come here to gossip.

Meanwhile as they were talking about somebody else, a particular person was smoking. I heard the priest say, like Jesus, shouting at the person, “Get lost from here. This is not a place for you to smoke.” Connecting all these incidents I felt perhaps we need to be keeping this sense of decorum, a sense of holiness of the place of God, where He dwells.

Going back again to the Old Testament we hear how God tells to Moses from the burning bush, when Moses was going closer to the burning bush with his sandals on, “Moses, Moses, do not come with your sandals on because the ground where you're standing is holy ground.” Today we hear in the Gospel how Jesus felt when these people were making his father's place a marketplace. He feels that something is going out of his own conviction, How can they make my father's house place of other activities? He was a Jew as well, and Jesus knew that the Jerusalem temple was a place where all people come once a year - all those people who are spread out. Even in our own parish people go to Florida and other warmer places and come back in the summer, right? In the same way actually, the Jewish people were spread out in different places and countries. And on Passover Day all people come to this temple and make their sacrifice and pray and offer all that they are supposed to do. They pay their tithe once in a year. As they come, they cannot bring all the animals for the sacrifices. That was the custom, that they come and do animal offerings. So when they come they come empty-handed and find some means to buy an animal there around the temple area. So that's why oxen, sheep and doves were being sold there. There were also money changers. They come from different continents and the money which they bring with them will not be accepted in that temple. Perhaps these Scribes and Pharisees were facilitating for the people so that they feel comfortable changing their money and making their offerings. It is a normal custom, but what happened exactly was that these people were charging more. In the pretext of changing money they charged more as a part of the tax and again in selling the animals they also charged more to the poor people. The poor people were finding it very difficult. Seeing these atrocities, seeing they were not being trustworthy, Jesus wonders how can they make this place a marketplace by not being truthful, not being faithful to what they are supposed to do? Yes, my dear sisters and brothers, we can see the anger of Jesus, see how it comes out by making a whip and just chasing them out. We can also see on other occasions when Jesus chides and scolds the Scribes saying, “You brood of vipers, you whitewashed tombs, you say one thing and you practice another.” Seeing the anger of Jesus, what comes into our hearts? What are we feeling in our lives? And again, feeling that immediate reaction of that king who said, “Remove my throne and keep the picture of Jesus. He should be the king and be ruling over the lives of people in my kingdom.”

Perhaps we come to the church, church is a meeting place, where we want to share all our thoughts - all of our emotions. Sometimes we want to speak extra. But in the process of talking and sharing our thoughts and exchanging our feelings, we sometimes forget that this is the place of worship. This is the place of sacredness. I was an associate pastor, immediately after my ordination, and there every Thursday was a rushed and a busy day, because that is a day for the infant Jesus. People just come in numbers. Thousands and thousands of people come on Thursdays. There is a shrine, and in that shrine, they come to follow all the rules and regulations. But still, in spite of that, people just don't have time, but they rush and push here and there and make noise. Just behind the statue of infant Jesus, it is written, "The more you honor me, the more I will bless you." Of course, they must all return to keep the discipline, but still the fact is, the more that we honor God, the more God will bless us. In the first reading we heard, there is no other God but Yahweh. Today that is what we really need to feel in our lives, also. Do we keep this person of Jesus as the uppermost, keeping the priority of God in our lives? When we come to the place of worship, the sacred place, do we feel that this is the place of honor, this is a place of prayer, this is a place of worship? Do we keep that decorum, and keep that sense of sacredness in our life? Let us take care that Jesus does not come and tell us, "Do not make my father's house a marketplace." Definitely, we do respect, but we need to be always conscious of this, not only in the place of worship but also as St. Paul tells us, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, you need to keep that body as holy as possible." And we need to really feel that sense of me being that temple where God dwells in me. I think the season of Lent calls us to be introspective. Analyzing it, asking, "Do I keep my body well, not defiling it? May I make this body as holy as possible, where God can dwell in me? Let us pray during this Eucharistic celebration that we respect God as our priority, as our king who can reign our own lives and hearts. And also, keep that sacredness of the holy place, the worshipping place, wherever we may go. Amen.