

Sunday of Lent – Week III

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

We Catholics sure do love our churches. And we have a million of them -- some small and austere, some enormous and elaborate.

Though there is a difference in the aesthetics of these various structures, we don't consider what "happens" within those walls to be different in any significant respect.

What happens on a Sunday in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is the same as what happens in a tiny church in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. And because of this, we Catholics feel the freedom to worship in any of our churches and participate in the fullest sense of the word.

And so, it may be somewhat difficult for us to understand just how important the temple was to the Jewish people. Put simply -- it was the heart and soul of Jewish life and identity.

The gospel reading today tells us that as Jesus walks into the temple, he sees the people selling the cattle and the sheep and the birds, and hears the noise, the shouting, the bargaining, the bragging, the bleating and the cooing, and even smells the sweat and the dung of the nervous animals;

He sees and hears and smells all these things that are there for the sake of the salvation of God's people, and he becomes tremendously angry!

"Stop this!" Jesus shouts.

"Stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

You know, it sometimes takes a fresh eye to see just what we have done to the Holy Things of God, to those things that are meant to help us meet God.

My friends, everything Jesus rejected in the temple was put there -- at first - with the best intentions, it was put there to help people who came to the temple to seek God's will for their lives and to thank him for his love.

Sunday of Lent – Week III

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

Yet it was wrong. What had started as a good thing, had become an abominable thing. And I wonder if there are still today some things that provoke Jesus to that kind of anger?

I wonder if there are some things that have to be driven out of our lives and our churches, because instead of bringing us closer to God they prevent us from encountering him?

Allow me to tell a story about two brothers who never seemed to get along.

From early infancy, while bathing, they not only splashed each other's eyes with soapy water, Timmy would throw Johnny's rubber ducky out of the tub, while Johnny squeezed Timmy's toes as hard as he could until Timmy yelled "Mommy!"

That's the way it was for most of their early years and through their teens.

Then war came, and they were both drafted. As luck would have it, they were assigned to the same company. They were often found treating one another as in the old days. But the day finally came when they were called to fight others, the real enemy and put all sibling quarrels aside.

Soon, however, they found themselves separated far apart on the field of battle. Johnny was struck by a bullet. Tim saw him fall. He started for him.

"Where are you going?" his commanding officer shouted.

"To get my brother. He's been hit."

"He's probably dead," said the officer. "There's no use risking your life to bring in a dead body."

Sunday of Lent – Week III

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

“But he’s my brother.” And after further pleading the officer consented. Just as Tim reached Johnny, Johnny died.

“There you see,” said the officer when Tim brought back his dead brother. “You risked your life for nothing.”

“No,” replied Tim. “I did what was expected of me, and I have my reward. When I crept up to him and took him in my arms, my brother Johnny said to me, ‘Tim, I knew you’d come - I just felt you would come.’”

You and I, all of us, can count on Jesus.

Though he knows how uncommitted and unloving we can be towards him, though we often turn our backs on him and desert him, he will never desert us. Jesus is continually going out on fields of battle, doing whatever it takes to bring us back. No matter whatever it is that happens the Lord is there with us and for us.

And that has beautiful and profound ramifications for each of us, for our church and for our world.

You see, it’s not only a place or building where God dwells that is holy. It is also the God dwelling within our very hearts, souls, minds, and bodies that makes it holy, the God we make manifest -- wherever we may be -- through our corporal acts of mercy, through our compassion, sacrifice, almsgiving and love. Isn’t this what Lent is all about?

A time for realizing not only of those things that need to be cleansed out of our lives, but also embracing God – the source of all goodness and love, within us as well as within one another.

In truth, it’s because that’s where God lives.