

Homily. 3rd Sunday in Lent. Year. B. 2/3 March 2024.

The dramatic action of Jesus, commonly called 'The cleansing of the Temple' made such a deep impression on the disciples and others who witnessed it that it's recorded in all 4 gospels. Mathew, Mark and Luke locate this event late in Jesus ministry referring to it as one of the main triggers that eventually lead to his arrest. John, the last of the gospels to be written, puts this action early in his story, in Chapter 2 in fact. He did so because he saw that what Jesus did drew a defining line in the sand between the old days of Jerusalem Temple sacrifices and worship and the new era of Christian worship and communion in Christ.

In the scene presented to us it's indisputable that Jesus was very angry, but what made him so? It wasn't because the Temple had a piety stall selling religious objects, cards and books, nor was it because people gathered in the Temple forecourts to meet, greet and discuss their lives and the politics of their time. There was nothing wrong about any of that for Jesus than there is for us today. No, what angered Jesus so much was that the people who exchanged Roman money marked by the head of the idol god-emperors for acceptable non-idolatrous Temple coins and those who sold the birds and animals for sacrifice charged the captive faithful crowd extortionate prices and rates. They did this so that they could profit handsomely off the piety and faith of their religious kinsmen and women. This is the market, the den of thieves, that Jesus angrily upturned and scattered across those Jerusalem Temple stones.

Jesus did this brave, defiant act since he knew from his prayer that God wanted people to be able to worship without being abused and robbed in the process. He clearly grasped that personal prayer and communal

worship always leads us to reject injustice and to stand up for the rights of those who are being downtrodden and abused. He'd taught this way himself in sayings such as; Happy are those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied; Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The Temple drama is a prime example of Jesus living out the meaning and wisdom of his life of prayer by putting into practice what he taught and preached.

Praying must lead us to serve others or it's not true prayer at all. There are two broad ways to serve God and others; the way of caring for people and the way of standing up for people against injustice and any kind of abuse. Because of who we are and how we've been formed by life and our faith we'll tend to favour one or other of these ways, be it caring, helping, welcoming and tending to people's needs and hurts or standing with, speaking out for and defending their rights and dignity when they are threatened by disrespect and diminishment. At the right time and place both are required of us since both flow from God's heart. Jesus clearing out and cleaning up the Temple is a stand out example of this latter way.

Of course, this wasn't going to best please the authorities and the sellers who profited from the racketeering of the market, and they let Jesus know so. His response was to point to the coming new era of worship, a new temple that would be his own body, to worship in Spirit and in truth. We are members of his body, the Church here and his Spirit dwells within us, making us into living temples of God's grace in Christ. Knowing this to be so and living accordingly for God and each other is the fruit of our prayer.