

HOMILY ~ THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

MARCH 2/3, 2024

I think that it is no mistake that the Lenten season falls during the end of winter and the beginning of Spring. These seasons allow for many analogies of Lent and the physical seasons: the paschal mystery, the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.

As the snow melts, things around us look brown and dead. However, as the temperatures rise, we begin to see the blooms in the ground of tulips and all other spring type flowers. We become excited for the re-energizing of the earth, and thus our inner fire is lit to do that deep cleaning of our living quarters. Lent, in a sense, is our journey of pruning our spiritual and faith dead growth and allows for the newness and rebirth of new and exciting spiritual habits. During Lent, we allow the Master Gardener to work the soil in us, so that we too may rise to new life with him on Easter.

In our homes, we purge those items no longer needed to make room for newer and more useful items. We change out our wardrobes from those heavy winter clothes to the lightweight wardrobe of spring! We make sure our golf clubs are clean, our soccer cleats are able to grip and our baseball mitts are oiled and flexible.

Today we see Jesus doing His "spring cleaning" in the Temple. He is doing that deep, spring clean of his Father's house, changing it from the marketplace it had become. Making a whip, Jesus drives the animals out and overturns the tables of the moneychangers. Jesus loses his cool. Jesus losing his cool is something that is unthinkable. It could not have happened because we know Jesus as meek, humble, merciful, compassionate, kind and loving. For him to lose His cool is simply out of character for him. But Jesus gets angry at what they do, and he says to them: "***Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade.***"

What is his reason in saying these words? His reason could be: compassion for the poor people who are being exploited by them; irreverence of the temple worship; and abuses tolerated by the religious authorities. The Readings also remind us to go back to the three basic principles of Christian life. I call these three principles as the **Three R's of Christian life**.

The first R or principle is Relationship. Christianity is not just a religion, but also a relationship. The essence of the ethics of Jesus is not only a law, but a relationship of person to God. We pray, we worship, we attend Mass and we read the Bible because we want to deepen this kind of relationship with Him. We deepen not only our relationship with Him, but also our relationship with other people.

The second R or principle is Reliance. Reliance or dependence on God is more basic to our fulfillment than dependence on material things. No doubt, money is the sixth sense which enables us to enjoy the other five. But the picture of the merchants being driven out by Jesus from the Temple warns us of preoccupation with money. Money can buy food, but not appetite; money can buy medicine, but not health; money can buy a house, but not a home; money can buy companions, but not friends; money can buy everything, but not eternal happiness. I know of a person who had everything in life: money, wealth, food, houses, cars, beautiful wife and so on. He worked eighteen hours a day just to acquire more money; but in the end, he committed suicide. Let us rely on God because without Him we can do nothing.

The third R or principle is Renewal. Religion is in the heart and not only in the knees. It is because no matter how long our prayers are with our knees on the floor of the Church, if we do not change our hearts for the better, nothing will happen and nothing will change.

These are the three basic principles of Christian life: Relationship, Reliance and Renewal. The scripture today tells us about the cleansing of the temple, of corruption and possibly even vice, greed, and who knows what else. What about our own cleansing? Our cleansing of sin in our own spiritual life, our environment, the entire global community? With so many problems, cracking one's whip cannot be enough. The first step to take is to focus on self. How about a good confession [the Sacrament of Reconciliation] sometime during Lent. It still is not too late!

Peace,
Deacon Don