

Third weekend of Lent 2021

A Reflection on the scriptures by Fr Sylvester O'Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

A Time of Cleansing

Today we have John's version of the cleansing of the temple, anticipating the replacement of temple worship by the worship of God through the risen Lord (John 2:13-25).

Herod the Great, a man of mixed racial lineage, desiring to ingratiate himself with the Jews decided to build a magnificent temple with a gold-plated dome. The whole complex was more to the glory of Herod than of God. The money for this undertaking was raised by multiple forms of taxation. Foreign coins bearing image of a pagan ruler were not allowed. The sacred area had become a moneychanger's bureau, a mart and huge abattoir where thousands of lambs were sacrificed. You can imagine the bleating of sheep, the squawking of birds, the hustling of people and the heavy smell of offal and blood. It was everything but a place of prayer.

My Father's house

When Jesus, at the age of twelve, came to the temple with his parents, he was seriously disillusioned by what he saw. He informed Mary and Joseph that one day he would transform his Father's house. When his time came, he made a whip of cord to drive out the animals, and overturned the moneychangers' tables. Realistically, it is unlikely that his little whip made any huge clearance, but it was a symbolic gesture passing judgement on a religious system which had lost its way and its right to survive. Challenged by the authorities about what he had done, Jesus answered, "Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up". This enigmatic answer would not be understood until after the resurrection of Jesus three days after the destruction of his mortal body. There would be no further need for lambs to be sacrificed because, as John the Baptist recognised, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He died at the very time when the lambs were being sacrificed in the temple. Three days later, in rising from the dead a new way to God was opened.

Worship in spirit and in truth



Jesus explained to the woman at the well in Samaria that true worship would not be conditional on the correct place but would be "in spirit in truth." At the last supper Jesus established a new liturgy. The risen Lord would be the new temple of divine worship. "Do this in memory of me". True worship is in the liturgical memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord. "No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Through Jesus as the

mediator with God: with him since he is united with us in our humanity: and in him as parts

of the body of which he is the head. Obviously, this worship is what we recognise as the celebration of the Eucharist.

Cleansing of the Church

Saint Paul identified the Christian community, the Church, as a new temple. "Do you not recognise that you are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in you?" (1 Cor 3:16).

The self-destructive process which infected the old temple system represents a tendency which can recur in any religious institution. It applies to the Church. There is an old saying that the Church must be ever reforming. Just as Jesus saw that many of the temple regulations needed cleansing, the Church is in constant need of self-examination.

In a famous Christmas address to members of his Curia, Pope Francis highlighted clericalism as one form of sickness. After years of evasion in the matter of sexual abuse by church personnel, it was eventually recognised that clericalism was at the root of the failure to deal with the problem. We are the untouchables, it has nothing to do with civil authorities!

In any institution, rules or customs which formerly expressed something of value may now be counter-productive. You are either open to change or you die. Pope Francis wrote in *The Joy of the Gospel*, "In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine, and for the Church's prestige, but without concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time". A Church unwilling to change becomes a museum of dead fossils instead of a Spirit-filled home of evangelization.

After the pandemic

There are strong signs that the Covid-19 pandemic will be controlled. Please God we will soon see a return to normality. But since all of us have changed somewhat in mind and spirit, the new normal will not be the same as before the pandemic.

Will the great neighbourly support continue? Can you think of any way you are better person because of the lockdown?

How many will return to Mass? It is likely that many for whom weekend Mass was a dull routine will not return. On the other hand, there may be others who had become careless about Mass, might appreciate what they have missed and now will return.

Where do you stand? Do you miss Mass? Do you like the streamed Mass on television?

Do you miss receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, or was this a sort of routine which really did not mean a lot? Have you replaced going to the local church by more prayer at home?

Prayer

O God, you make all things new. May the Holy Spirit who transformed the apostles at Pentecost, continue to refresh the Church and the face of the earth in a new Pentecost.