

3rd Sunday Lent (B)

4th March 2018

'Clearing a space in the Temple of the heart'

Ex 20: The 10 Commandments Rom 8: *We are preaching a crucified Christ*
Jn 2: 13–25: *Stop turning my Father's house into a market!*

These next three Sundays — the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent — are, in a way, the heart of our sacred season, and in this year we hear three powerful Gospel passages from St John's, which prepare us for the events to come at the end of Lent: Jesus's Passion & Death.

This week's passage, Jesus's cleansing of the Temple, sets Him up in rather stark opposition to the Temple authorities, and showed that He assumed personal authority over His Father's House. He wants to restore the Temple fully to its role for prayer and worship. The animals for the sacrifice, and the money changers for the Temple tax to be paid in shekels, were understandable parts of the Jewish rituals, ... but they were getting in the way, Jesus felt. They were good things, but taking priority over the central-most thing, which should have been the quiet and prayer of raising the heart and mind to God. All that business of trade and money-changing was obscuring the real purpose of the Temple, distracting from their prayer.

It's a wonderful image, I feel, for what we are about in Lent. This season of fasting and almsgiving is a chance to create space for our prayer — it's a plea to Jesus to clear that space in our lives and in our hearts, so that our prayer and worship of God our loving Creator can take place with fewer distractions. In Lent, we ask Jesus to come into our lives and to clear out the obstacles — and it can be a process that we don't necessarily find easy. We get used to the clutter, to the things that distract us, we muddle along in all the confusion, and often neglect to praise God and pray to Him in our daily lives. In Lent, we ask Our Lord to come and clear out the Temple that is our innermost soul, to free it up, and freshen it, so that we can more easily see and love the God who made us, our loving Father. This is why we offer up our special disciplines of self-denial (fasting) and our almsgiving (charity) in these holy weeks, so as to make the ground ready for Jesus's spring-clean, His full-scale clear-out.

It is our sins, above all, that Jesus wishes to clear away and cleanse our souls of, and these are the greatest

obstacles to being in healthy relationship with God. Our Lord desires so much that we invite Him in and allow Him to wipe them away. By this time in Lent we should be making plans for our Lenten Confession, and committing ourselves to approaching the Sacrament in the next 4 wks. I would suggest that you don't leave it till the end of Lent, or something will crop up — some distraction or other — and then the season will have gone by without the intended Confession, despite our best intentions. I'll be offering another weekday-evening hour for Confession this Wednesday (6–7pm), and then our parish Penitential Service will come on the Tuesday of Holy Week (27th). And of course, as always in Lent, I make myself available straight after every weekend Mass, as am keen to make it as easy as possible for you to have the availability that you need to invite Our Lord to wash away your sins, as He so desires.

What is it that we should be confessing, then? Well, the first reading has given us a wonderful starting-point in the 10 Commandments. 3000+yrs old, though they are, yet

they come from God, and are a timeless way of measuring ourselves up against the wisdom of God. He knows that men and women will live happily on earth, and so He gave the Jews this basis of the Law, which Jesus reiterated in His own divine teaching. We can make no better start than to meditate honestly on the 10 Commandments ... Is there anything there in how I live my life of faith, and in how I treat my neighbour, that I really need to bring before Jesus my Saviour in Confession?

This pairing of readings, today, then, is highly instructive for us. It urges us to take Lent seriously, to take the invitation offered us by God to really be cleansed, and provided with that fresh new beginning that He wants for us, in holiness and gentleness. Let's pledge ourselves again this 3rd Sunday of Lent to keeping a good Lent, to keeping it in all its aspects, and that means including a thorough, honest, life-giving celebration of Reconciliation. Let's ask the Lord, now, for the grace we need to do just that ...