

CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE HOMILY

3RD Sunday of Lent-Year B

John 2:13-25

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Speaking of Money Changers.....

A little known fact:

Did you know that there are more Catholic churches in Las Vegas than there are casinos?

During Sunday services some worshippers toss casino chips into the collection baskets rather than cash.

This causes a problem since they get chips from so many different casinos and casinos will not redeem chips from other casinos.

So to redeem them, the churches send all the chips to the local monastery for sorting.

Once sorted into the respective casino chips, one junior monk takes the collections and makes the rounds to the casinos turning chips into cash.

You may have heard of him? He is the Chip Monk.

So, How is your Lenten experience going for you?

Remember last week, Father Ed spoke about how it shouldn't be what do I get out of mass, but rather how much do I put into it?

Going back a few weeks further, I remember Father Ed talking about how during the liturgy, If you open your heart to the scripture readings they will speak to you in a special way.

Today's Gospel reading offers up a good example of this that I would like to share with you.

As I prepared to preach today, something in today's Gospel jumped out at me. It was verse 15: "He made a whip out of cords."

What really struck me about this:

The contrast of Jesus' hands that we know well: the praying, loving, caring, tender hands...., against the clenched, trembling whip weaving hands. Quite a sharp contrast here isn't there? This offers much insight into the humanness of Jesus.

I ask you to take a moment, close your eyes, and imagine yourself looking at the loving hands of Jesus. His gentle loving hands. Can you see the tenderness in his hands?

The hands that reach out to welcome, to cure, to love, to comfort. The promise of his grace pouring forth?

Now, if you will, open your eyes, take a moment and look at your own hands . Palms up.

Do you see the "gentleness" in your hands? The potential for offering love, comfort, welcome to others, reaching out to love the Lord and one another.

Now, How about Jesus' hands in today's gospel. "He made a whip of cords." Do you see the contrast between Love and anger?

There wouldn't have been anger without the love.

Now look at the angry hands of Jesus. Are they clenched? Shaking? Did Jesus' hands tremble as he fashioned a whip of cords?

Can you see his one fist holding the whip, and his other clenched?

What do you think the apostles were thinking as they watched Jesus with the whip in his hands?

The gospel says he drove them out with the sheep and the oxen. The Gospel doesn't say that he struck them with his whip.

This week I was reflecting on this reading and sharing my thoughts with my spiritual director. A Sister of Saint Joseph, a very wise, gentle woman.

She asked me if I thought Jesus hit the merchants and the money changers with the whip.

She asked....If he were to hit them with his whip, how do you think his apostles would have reacted?

The sight of Jesus Striking other human beings with a whip certainly would have forged a strong visual to remain forever in the back of their minds, wouldn't it?

Would they have feared Jesus? Would they have been able to get really close to Jesus from that point forward? How about us, during this lenten season, as we attempt to get closer to Jesus?

Did Jesus ever get violent with another human being? Even when he was on death row, being tortured, spit at, did he strike back?

In this Gospel, Jesus was angry, but was his reaction a violent act causing bodily harm, or an act, a demonstration of controlled anger...to make a point?

And what was it that made Jesus so angry?

Today's Gospel reading speaks of money changers and many other things that caught Jesus' attention.

Lets dig a bit deeper here ok? This reading speaks of exploitation, worship without reverence, greed, arrogance, disrespect, oppression, lack of social justice. Need I go on?

Jesus came to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. People from all over would converge upon Jerusalem, the temple.

This was a major event. There was a temple tax to be paid by every Jew over 19 years old. The tax was equivalent to almost two days wages.

...And because people from all over came, they brought with them coins from all over...Rome, Greece, Egypt etc....These coins were considered impure.

But the temple tax had to be paid in Galilean coins or coins of the Temple.

They had temple money changers. The money changers were permitted to make a modest commission, but greed took hold and they were charging approximately one days wage per transaction.

(Too bad there wasn't an honest chip monk available to help redeem them)

On its own, the wealth accrued from the temple tax was fantastic. Over 2 and a quarter million people would come to the temple for Passover.

The money changers profits alone would run into thousands even tens of thousands.

Commission for the money changer was permitted, but what enraged Jesus was that pilgrims coming to the Passover to worship, could ill afford it, and they were being fleeced by the money changers.

This was a rampant and shameless social injustice being done in the name of religion.

The sellers of the oxen, sheep and doves were playing a con game also. People were bringing their offerings, which were to be perfect offerings, unblemished.

Their perfect offerings were being rejected at the doors (as imperfect) and they were told to buy perfect inside the temple.

They then were grossly overcharged for their purchase inside. A pair of doves would cost as much as 15 times more inside, than the actual value called for outside.

This was bare faced extortion aimed at the poor and humble pilgrims.

The money changing and sacrificial animal selling was being done in an area of the temple where the women and the gentiles were **required** to worship. The noise was unbearable.

If a Gentiles heart had been touched by God, and he or she came to the temple to pray, all of the money changing, buying and selling surely disrupted their peace and prayer.

Mark 11:17 states, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples, but you have made it a den of thieves!

Witnessing the unruly conduct in the temple court moved Jesus to the depths of his heart.

People who were seeking God were being shut out from Gods presence.

Jesus reveals his righteous anger when what is intended to help people gets abused by human greed.

We, like the apostles can't forget Jesus' indignation when he meets injustice or when any obstructions or limits are put on those seeking God.

What about us here, our congregation?

Have you noticed the welcoming atmosphere when you enter into this building?

The 1st thing I experienced when I came here as your new parish Deacon was a warm sense of welcome.

Lately I have been meeting individuals and families who have recently joined our parish. They all mention to me the welcoming sprit they feel here.

It seems that we as a community open our arms to welcome those who are touched by God in a special way, and have come to pray, to get closer to God.

As Christians, through baptism, we are called to be part of the community, the body of Christ, offering to the body our talents for the common good.

This week, the third week of lent, Take some time to look at social justice issues of our time, and as you enter into solitary prayer, Imagine the hands of Christ again. This time holding you close.

Look at your hands and ask Christ to allow your hands to be the hands of Christ as you go forth to love and serve the Lord and one another.

Allow the Lords grace to cleanse you, the temple of your heart, making it a perfect place for you and the Lord to meet and pray together.