

Third Sunday of Lent – B

My dad was a mechanic, and I do a little amateur repair work on the side. So a few years ago, someone brought a Honda Pilot over for diagnosis of some odd noises from underneath. I opened the hood and there, sitting by the battery, was their neighbor's cat. Before this really had a chance to register, the cat was up and out and across the yard – none the worse for the ride. I think we were both surprised to see each other. I'm not a great repairman, but at least mechanically savvy enough to know: *that cat does not belong in there.*

The same logic interprets this Gospel. What does not belong in the Temple? The oxen, sheep, doves, and money changers were there at the time of Jesus to facilitate the various temple rituals. But over time, *the relationship with God that was to be kept fresh and alive by those rituals* grew weak in the hearts of His people. The practice of their faith became distorted into a kind of commercial exchange, a way to keep God satisfied so they could get on with what was really important to them in life. They lost the sense of living in a Covenant with the God Who loved them, had set them free, and wanted to be part of their daily lives ... not for His sake, but for theirs. The Ten Commandments, too, seemed more like a burden instead of the way of Life God had given them precisely to protect that covenant freedom.

John the Baptist saw Jesus and declared, "Look, the Lamb of God!" Like the Passover lamb in Exodus, Jesus is the Sacrifice Whose Blood frees us and the Food we need to sustain us on our journey to the place God prepares for us. Indeed, zeal for the household of God consumed Jesus in His death of the Cross, so that we are able to consume the Risen Christ in the Eucharist as the Bread of Eternal Life. This sacrifice of salvation cannot be bought and sold or traded like a commodity. It is the free and unimaginable Gift of divine Love made flesh so that Jesus could die rather than see us lost. Jesus shares this very passage from death to life with us, one by one, in Baptism, where we are made into living Temples of the Holy Spirit.

Each morning, we might look in the mirror and remind ourselves of that truth: “You are a Temple of the Spirit, Who dwells within you.” So we come full circle, and back to that question: ***What does not belong in the temple?*** What has entered my life that does not fit a disciple of Christ – pride, greed, gossip, dishonesty, lust, foul language, jealousy, anger? As the Gospel today reminds us, the Cleansing of this Temple does not come without struggle or pain, and it may take some time; but Jesus will heal us in His mercy when we come to Him in honesty and humility. He will never take away what we truly need; only the things that stand in our way. And we need never fear opening our secrets and problems to Him, for as John says, He knows our human weakness, and regards us always with the love that can heal us.

Like the cat under the hood, we might want to jump out and run away from that work of healing, or focus on other people’s faults while justifying our own. But with courage that is one of the Gifts the Holy Spirit brings into our lives, we can say: ***Come, Lord Jesus, raise us up and help us cleanse the Temple that You have made of each of us, so that only what is worthy of your love and goodness remains.***