

Rectoría de San Juan de Dios
III Sunday of Lent-Cycle B
Ex 20, 1-17; Ps 19; 1 Cor 1, 22-25; Jn 2, 13-25
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Let Us Enter the New Temple

We have dared to find our inner strength (first week) and we have gone up the mountain where Jesus manifested His glory; we realized that we must work hard to reach the divine condition (second week). Now we intend to enter into the construction of the new temple of God.

The scene of Jesus's running the merchants and money changers out of the courtyard of the gentiles is colorful and full of signs. We approach this literary photograph discovering the zeal of Jesus for completing the plan of His Father God.

We imagine what Jesus experiences: a crowd of people, in constant motion, pulling along their sacrificial animals, treating them both commercially and religiously; the air filled with animal sounds and heavy with the smell of animal manure. There would have been a terrible commotion and a tension at the entrance to the place of sacrifice. The gentiles, the non-Jewish people who came from distant places, mixed with the poorest Jews, each with a single purpose: to find God in His temple and to carry out the traditional worship, sacrificing an animal suited to their means to purify themselves, and to pay the temple tax.

Jesus sees beyond that scene: that form of worship no longer communicates with God; the leaders of the temple whose function it was to signify the active presence of God have, contrary to their function, annulled it by making the

temple a marketplace. The structures that have been designed to lead the people to God, far from helping them, have been converted into a system of exploitation, especially for the poorest.

The Jewish Passover no longer preserved the liberating character that it had in the ancient Passover. Jesus engages in a symbolic act: to whip with cords was the symbol of a peaceful messianism. (Zec 14, 21) Through this prophetic act, Jesus announces His purpose: to take the people out of the religious institution in which they are victims.

Jesus saw a world of people who would return to their homes unchanged, without having experienced the active presence of God, without having a true liberating and salvific experience; for that reason, he declares the temple of stone obsolete and proposes the temple of His body. From then on, the place where God appears is within man himself.

We do not want to remain in the courtyard of the gentiles without managing to enter into the temple where God appears. How long has it been since you have experienced the active presence of God in your heart?

Now, in this third phase of our time in the Lenten desert, let us reach the new temple of God:

1-Let us get out of idolatry.

This means to discover the idols that we have made, just as the people of Israel did. We could ask ourselves, what are our idols? Am I very idolatrous?

From the experience of the People in the Old Testament, we will leave our idolatry behind, sustained by the law of God: His commandments. And from the

experience of Jesus, with the whip that cleans out our inner courtyard. At times, we have made our relationship with God merely commercial in that we behave just as did those in the time of Jesus, exploiting the weakest among us.

The desire of God in this first reading is to rescue His people from the slavery that comes with idolatry, and to lead His people to the experience of mutual love. Jesus desires, as God, that those who live an impoverished religion would come to the experience of a liberating and merciful God.

2- Let us purify our personal religion.

Just as the Corinthians had made their own idea of God into a religion for their own convenience, we could be doing the same; let us try to be aware when we place too many “buts” at the base of our religion. The Jews wanted miracles and the pagans—the Greeks among them—wanted wisdom. What do you want from God and religion? The answer is Christ; holding fast to His plan of the Cross is where the strength and the wisdom of God appear.

Pope Benedict XVI teaches us that we are not Christians because of an ethical decision or a great idea, but because of the encounter with an event, with a person, that gives a new perspective to life and, with it, a decisive orientation.¹

3-Let us live a new kind of worship.

If Jesus is the new sanctuary, if the Glory and the Spirit of God dwells in Him, then our encounter with Christ brings us to experience the active presence of God in our hearts, in our inner temple. This is sufficient to open our horizon to God, the universal Father of all men, the Father of a family who calls us to grow in Him.

¹ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter “God is Love,” 2006, No. 1.

Only if our new worship springs from the heart it is authentic and a source of new life.

In this moment in our personal story, as in the story of humanity, we are in need of cleaning out our inner courtyard where we have commercialized our relationship with God. And we need to cleanse the new “courtyard of the gentiles”² of the religious world, a symbolic place of dialogue in which all peoples with distinct religions can come together in the transcendent life of God and discover each other as brothers.

² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Annual discourse to the Roman curia for Christmas*. The Pope has coined this expression, taking its essence from the Prophet Isaiah. The temple should be a place of prayer for all peoples. Isaiah announces the one true God, not idols made by men in order to pacify their fears. In the time of Jesus, the “Gentiles” were peoples distinct from Israel. Afterward, they came to be the peoples that did not know Christianity; and today, the Pope tells us, “gentiles” are those who are discontent with their gods, rites, and myths because they realize that they cannot derive any true salvation from them. Although they don’t know it, they are waiting for the one true God and they want to pray to Him. They are all those who feel that their irreligiosity has not liberated them but has taken them to new myths. The new gentiles for whom “religion is a rare thing” and who, nevertheless, do not want to simply remain without God and are tired of, or even disgusted with, the gods that irreligion has imposed, might find themselves in the new “courtyard of the gentiles” in order to become close to God. The Church wants to open these new courtyards in order to make possible the encounter of man with God.