

Third Sunday of Lent

Year B

7th March 2021



The fiery Jesus of the gospel reading who is passionate about what God wants remains alive and active at the heart of the Church today. The relationship between the Lord and the Church, between the Lord and each one of us, will always be marked by a certain tension, because the Lord will always be working to purify and renew us. In the light of the gospel reading, we might ask ourselves in what ways have we allowed the values of the market place to override the values of the gospel in our own lives, in the life of our society, in the life of our Church?

Opening Prayer

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness, who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving have shown us a remedy for sin, look graciously on this confession of our lowliness, that we, who are bowed down by our conscience, may always be lifted up by your mercy.

Exodus 20:1-17

God spoke all these words. He said, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

'You shall have no gods except me. You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God and I punish the father's fault in the sons, the grandsons, and the great-grandsons of those who hate me; but I show kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not utter the name of the Lord your God to misuse it, for the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it. Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath for the Lord your God.

You shall do no work that day, neither you nor your son nor your daughter nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals nor the stranger who lives with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that these hold, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why the Lord has blessed the sabbath day and made it sacred. Honour your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God has given to you. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his.'

Israel has been liberated from slavery in Egypt and has set out into the wilderness. The people have encountered thirst and hunger, and God has provided sweet water and bread from heaven. They have been attacked and have been victorious, and they have finally reached Sinai. In chapter 19, God makes a covenant with Israel: Israel will be God's treasured

possession, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation, if the people keep their end of the covenant. Here, unlike in the covenants with Noah and with Abraham in Genesis 17, a mutual covenant is established: Israel must follow God's commands if they are to remain God's people. A covenant is an exchange of people. Commandments without a covenant would be rules without a relationship. A covenant must always come first.

Sinai has been the place to which God has been leading all along, and not just from the escape from Egypt. The whole journey, from creation forward, has been leading to this place. It is at Sinai that God shows the Israelites the harmonious world in which they are meant to live, and calls them to live in it. It's as if God is saying, "This is what you were made for. You were not made to wander, to be afraid, to hunger and thirst, to be lost. You were made to live in this community of justice, in right relationship with your God. Stay true to these commandments, and this is where you will remain.

Psalm 18(19):8-11

The law of the Lord is perfect, it revives the soul.

The rule of the Lord is to be trusted, it gives wisdom to the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, they gladden the heart.

The command of the Lord is clear, it gives light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is holy, abiding for ever.

The decrees of the Lord are truth and all of them just.

They are more to be desired than gold, than the purest of gold and sweeter are they than honey, than honey from the comb.



1 Corinthians 1:22-25

While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, here are we preaching a crucified Christ; to the Jews an obstacle that they cannot get over, to the pagans madness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Paul sets God's wisdom over against human wisdom, God's power over against human strength. The church can sometimes substitute God's wisdom with human wisdom, God's power with human strength. Just as in the gospel reading Jesus wanted to purify the temple, the risen Lord is constantly working to purify the Church. All of us who make up the Church need to be open to his purifying presence. In the words of the book of Revelation, we need to be listening to what the Spirit, the Spirit of the risen Lord, is saying to us, the Church. Those in positions of leadership in the Church have a special responsibility to listen to what the Spirit may be saying to it, so as to bring it more into line with what God intends. However, we are all called to listen to the challenging word of the Spirit and to be open to the purifying presence of the risen Lord. We are all the Church, and we all have our part to play in ensuring that the Church is what the Lord intends it to be. Lent in particular is a time when we try to listen to what the Spirit may be saying to us about our lives; it is a time when as individuals and as a community we are called to allow the Spirit to renew our lives so that we conform more fully to the image and likeness of Christ.

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!

*I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord;
whoever believes in me will never die.*

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!

John 2:13-25

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting at their counters there.

Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money-changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said. During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

In Jerusalem, at the time of Jesus, the most significant public building by far was the temple. The Jewish authorities remind Jesus that it had taken forty-six years to build, indeed, the temple begun by Herod the Great was not yet complete and would take another fourteen years, sixty years in total, for it to be completed.

Jesus was aware of the huge religious and political significance of the temple in his day, and yet he challenged it, and he challenged those responsible for it, because he recognised that the temple was not serving God's purposes. Jesus tells the authorities, 'Stop turning my Father's house into a market'. There is a big difference between a house and a market. A house has the potential to become a home. A market could never really be a home; people go to markets to buy and sell. Buying and selling

are not activities you associate with home. The temple was to be God's house, God's home, a place where all people could feel at home in God's presence. The activities associated with the market were preventing the temple from being the home that God wanted it to be, a spiritual home, a place of security and peace for all the nations. Jesus saw that here was an institution in need of reform.

Prayer over the Offerings

Be pleased, O Lord, with these sacrificial offerings, and grant that we who beseech pardon for our own sins, may take care to forgive our neighbour.



Prayer after Communion

As we receive the pledge of things yet hidden in heaven and are nourished while still on earth with the Bread that comes from on high, we humbly entreat you, O Lord, that what is being brought about in us in mystery may come to true completion.

Prayer over the People

Direct, O Lord, we pray, the hearts of your faithful, and in your kindness grant your servants this grace: that, abiding in the love of you and their neighbour, they may fulfil the whole of your commands.