

Rev. Derek Fairman

3rd Sunday of Lent B

The Gospel for the 3rd Sunday of Lent brings us to the Temple, where the Lord Jesus is present for the Passover and where He proceeds to drive out those buying and selling animals as well as the moneychangers. This provokes a reaction among those who are in the Temple, especially those who are in authority. What reaction do we have? What does this teach us, and what does this have to do with Lent?

The Lord Jesus rids the Temple of those selling the animals and other offerings that would be used in the Temple sacrifice. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with people buying or selling animals, why do this in the Temple area? Why not do so in the marketplace in the section of the city in which the Temple is located? The Lord Jesus, we are told, did not drive the market out of the marketplace but out of the Temple area.

This business of buying and selling animals, as well as setting up a currency exchange in the Temple, had an effect upon how people looked at the Temple. The business that went on in the Temple was no longer “holy.” Rather, the earthly business of buying and selling and exchanging money had taken over the Temple area. That was what pervaded the atmosphere around the Temple, and not the holiness of the Lord’s presence. To the eyes and the minds of some of the people, the Temple was just another part of this world.

The point of the Temple was to bring holiness into this world. The Lord’s presence in the Temple was meant to pervade the lives of those who came to the Temple. So, the Temple was supposed to be Heaven on earth. We can understand why the Lord Jesus drove out the moneychangers as well as those buying and selling animals: they wanted to bring earth into Heaven. Instead of conforming themselves to being in God’s presence, they wanted God to accommodate their presence and their business in His own house.

This Temple had its own history. The Lord Jesus did not come to the Temple built by King Solomon. The Temple that King Solomon built was destroyed by the Babylonians. The prophet Ezekiel had a vision in which he watched the Lord’s Presence leave the Temple. The reason was that the idolatry that the people of Judah had practiced became so overwhelming that the Lord no longer dwelt in the Temple and then soon after it was destroyed. The beauty of that Temple, which Solomon had constructed, became so polluted with the sins of idolatry that the Lord removed His Presence from it.

After the Jewish people returned from Exile, they went ahead and built a new Temple. Greek invaders desecrated this Temple, but then the Jewish people rededicated it, as told in the two Books of Maccabees. The Jewish people still celebrate this rededication every Hanukkah. It was this second Temple that the Lord Jesus came into. Then of course He cleansed this Temple, as we hear in the Gospel.

We have our own spiritual cleaning to do. During Lent, we prepare for the coming of Holy Week and Good Friday. Lent is a time of spiritual renewal. This episode with the Lord cleansing the Temple points to our souls, because St. Paul teaches us that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus wants to cleanse our souls.

This account of the Lord Jesus cleansing the Temple brings us to the Sacrament of Confession. The Lord Jesus did not cleanse the Temple because He hated moneychangers or because He hated animals. The Lord Jesus cleansed the Temple because of His zeal to protect the holiness of the Temple. What about our souls? Does the Lord Jesus care any less about the holiness of our souls?

The Lord Jesus does not want our souls to become polluted with sins, as the Temple that Solomon built became so polluted with the stains of idolatry. The Lord wants our souls to retain their beauty and their holiness. Of course, the best way to do that is to avoid sin, but when we do sin, the Lord will drive out all ugliness in the Sacrament of Confession.

The ugliness and vice that contaminates our souls come from sin. One sin may not seem like much, but one sin can lead to more, and those can lead to more and even worse sins. When we receive the Sacrament of Confession, we have the opportunity to not just wipe away sin, but also to avoid sin taking root in our hearts. We can make sure that those sins do not grow into a habit and that they do not lead to worse sins.

If we avoid Confession, then those sins are allowed to take root and grow even stronger in our hearts. We might think that we can just go to Confession some other time, because there are other things to worry about, or we might keep putting off Confession for some other reason. However, if we allow our sins to continue to build up, we risk sinking deeper into filth and we make it difficult for the Lord to dwell in us. If we avoid going to Confession, that time that we spend away from Confession is time that the ugliness of sin has time to grow.

We also think about those things that we are attached to, and how we need to let go. We may not be involved in idolatry in the literal sense, but there are many ways that our souls can be

attached to people and things, when they should be attached to God. There are those things that we hold dear that pull us away from God, and those things that we love more than God. The Lord wishes to drive out of our souls the self-love and the bad habits that we have.

As we approach the altar, we ask the Lord to fill us with the Holy Spirit, that He will lead us to Confession and that through the Sacrament of Confession the beauty and goodness and holiness of our souls will be restored. We pray that the Lord will drive out whatever vices and bad habits have taken root within our souls. We also pray that we will be able to approach the Lord with hearts and minds made pure. Even though we may not seem to care much about our souls and our spiritual lives, you can be sure that the Lord Jesus does.