

Third Sunday of Lent – March 8, 2015

When Jesus strode into the temple area that day and resolutely drove out the moneychangers and the animals and knocked over coin stalls, he was not the first to call attention to such un-Temple like behaviors. The prophet Jeremiah warned that the temple had become a den of thieves. Similar warnings can be found in other prophets as well: Zechariah, Malachi, even Isaiah. The action of Jesus in today's gospel would have been perfectly understandable in light of his claim that he too was a prophet and even the Messiah.

In today's gospel we come face-to-face with a resolute Jesus, filled with zeal for the purity of his Father's house. What's got Jesus so worked up? Well, for Jesus, it's not okay to have worship without a pure heart. It's not okay to arrange for sacrifices without a change of heart. It's not okay to allow evil to flourish unchecked and unchallenged. Someone has to take a stand. Has no one else noticed? Was no one else scandalized? Have all been forgiven over to indifference?

Jesus went to the beautiful-to-behold Temple and made a clear, unmistakable statement: "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace." He was not against the Temple per se; Jesus objected to the desecration of the Holy Place by a marketplace mentality, one that took advantage of the poor.

Examples of this kind of marketplace mentality are not difficult to come by. All around us, we see moneymaking schemes in the name of Jesus. Just as Jesus was about eliminating injustice and greed, so also must we, the church, guard against practices that shut out or discriminate against the poor. When we plan our programs and community celebrations, are we assuming that everyone has the resources to participate? Can everyone pay the fees or buy the books for religion classes? One bishop I know from decades ago asked his priests to always put forth one question at their parish meetings. It was this: "How do our decisions and plans this day affect the poor?" Good question. Care of the poor is not an afterthought. It is to be the primary responsibility of those who belong to Jesus.

Zeal for God's house and God's people are what consumed Jesus. His are the priorities we ought to live by. Maybe it's time to drive out all the "money changers" who shortchange us on the sacred places within us where God alone should dwell.