

• Exodus 20:1-17^[SEP] • 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 • John 2:13-25 [29B]

Did you ever hit the print button on your computer only to get the message that you were out of ink? Somehow it always happens to me when I have the least amount of time to fuss with it. And then, after the ink cartridge is replaced, the machine informs me that the print head now needs re-alignment. Now more time is lost and I am going to be late to my next meeting. I know that I should have replaced the ink a week ago, when I first got the warning, but there never seems to be enough time.

Well now, today is already the Third Sunday of Lent and I wonder where the time has gone. We are already halfway through our Lenten journey and I haven't begun reading any of the books that the parish gave to us for our spiritual growth this Lenten season.

So, how is it going for you? Are you making the spiritual progress that you hoped for on Ash Wednesday? Is it time for a re-alignment of your relationship with God and with one another?

Well, you are in luck. Relationship is the topic of today's readings, so let's begin there. The first reading and the Gospel today focus on two of Israel's most sacred places: Mount Sinai and the Temple in Jerusalem. These were sacred places because they are where Israel encountered God and learned the importance of the human-divine relationship.

The giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai was absolutely fundamental to Israel's status as a great and holy nation. No other people were selected by God to know his commandments. By following God's commandments, Israel was to become a people of God and a light to the nations. Scholars have long commented that the first three commandments center on our relationship with God, and the remaining seven highlight our relationship with one another. Put another way, God's fundamental "*command*" is to pay attention to our *relationships*. The Israelites would learn that to become a holy people and a great nation, they would need to nurture healthy and life-giving relationships with God and with one another. So, what about our relationships at home? Can you think of some ways that you can nurture your family relationships?

Is there a brother or a sister that you haven't spoken to for a long time? Are there some rough areas that you need to work out with your spouse? Are your kids so busy that they never seem to have time for a family meal together?

What about at work? Do you hold any resentment toward any of your co-workers? Are some of your co-workers difficult to work with, or do you need to look in the mirror to see the problem? Are there some people at work who need someone to talk to or someone's shoulder to cry on?

What about in the world? The Israelites received the Law on Mount Sinai so that they could become a people of God, and a light to the nations. How much more are we who received Jesus himself in the New Covenant to become a light to the world?

We have looked at our relationship at home, at work, and in the world. So, now we will turn our attention to the Jerusalem Temple and to our relationship with Jesus who is having a "cow" shall we say, as he drives out those who sold oxen, sheep and doves, as well as the money changers.

In Jesus' day, the Temple was the center of Jewish religious life. We know from Scripture how much Jesus loved the Temple. He traveled to Jerusalem frequently to attend feasts there. Even as a child, he referred to it as "my Father's house" (Lk 2:49). In fact, Saint John tells us that it was zeal for his Father's house that motivated Jesus to drive out the money changers in today's Gospel.

However, as with the Sabbath, Jesus challenges the religious pieties of his day, not out of disrespect, but to bring out their true meaning. Jesus was revealing that he would replace the Temple as the place where we encounter God, sacrifice, and worship. It is only from the perspective of the Resurrection that we can understand his cryptic words, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19).

The cleansing of the Temple puts Jesus at center stage. He has violated what has become the status quo of the Temple.

He has undercut the Temple economy, showing contempt for the deception that took money from the poor. He has made a mess of things, but in the mess is a message. "Do not violate what is sacred! Do not turn your lives away from the living God but return to God with all your heart."

When the Jews ask for a sign as to Jesus' authority for such actions, Jesus identifies his body with the Temple, which he will raise up in three days. Jesus will give them no sign, nor does he try to convince them who he is. He speaks to them, rather, of the ultimate sign: his death and resurrection.

If Jesus' body is the new temple come down from heaven, and we are the body of Christ, then our bodies are part of that new temple as well. A temple built of living stones with Jesus as both the foundation and capstone.

So, what do we allow in *our* temple courts? The market place in the court of the Gentiles was a noisy place. That left no place suitable for the God-fearing Gentiles to pray. We too have precious little quiet time left to pray. There is never enough time to go around, and we are all tired to the bone. As a result, we run the danger of giving in to laziness, boredom, and apathy in the area of faith.

How then, as Christians journeying through one more Lent, can we fan into flame our faith that we might stay strong until Easter and beyond? We need to set aside some quiet time for prayer and a cleansing introspection of our lives. Let the Christ who cleansed the Jerusalem Temple cleanse our temple as well. Let our souls be open to the purging that brings clarity once again. Jesus will show us the way to have life giving relationships at home at work and in the world if we can quiet ourselves and listen to Him. Don't wait any longer; you have already heard the noise and seen the warning signs. Re-align your priorities now before it is too late. Don't let your faith run dry like that ink in the printer.

Deacon Alan Christy

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