



Third Week of Lent (Year B): 7th / 8th March 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“You Lord, have the message of eternal life”

One of my favorite Churches in Rome is San Clemente, not far from Latern Basilica. Its origins go back to the house churches of the early centuries. But, it is especially for the beautiful mosaics, particularly the Crucifixion on the Apse, that I mention it this week. The Crucifixion with the Hand of God above is depicted as full of life: 12 flying doves (the 12 Apostles) are on the wood of the Cross, and from its foot springs a vine encircling the Doctors of the Church and other Saints, while the Rivers of Paradise flow from the Cross quenching the thirst of the faithful. We have a picture of it on the Burning Bush VLOG this weekend, because it relates to the fact that there is a deep meaning to the “Cleansing of the Temple”, the Gospel read on the Third Sunday of Lent. Essentially it has to do with the old way of worshipping God being replaced by a new way of relating to God, the old Temple was to be replaced by a new Temple which is Christ Himself.

What took place at the “Cleansing of the Temple” was a shock to those who observed the actions of Jesus. No longer do we see the “softer” side of Him, the child born in a stable or His healing the sick, but His anger at the way God’s House had become “a market”. St John in his Gospel speaks of the miracles Jesus works as “signs” and he proposes the greatest miracle of all, His Resurrection as the sign that justifies his action in cleaning the Temple of buyers and sellers. “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 Disciples only understood this fully after the Resurrection of Jesus.

The old Temple stood for the presence of God and His relationship to His people. The new fellowship of His people in which his life flows takes the place of the old Temple as the place when God has His dwelling among human beings.

The Disciples knew the meaning of the saying after the Resurrection; and later the understanding of His Body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit developed. For example, Corinthians 3:16 “Do you know that you are God’s temple and God’s Spirit dwells in you?” and Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are the Body of Christ and individually members of it.”

During Lent we reflect on the meaning of this sign for us and for our world. We can take the opportunity to consider the quality of our prayer and worship. In our prayers we seek to deepen our relationship with the person of Christ. In our worship with the community, we gather to experience a new passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus and its significance in our lives. Christ promises to be with us when we gather for prayer.

In his reflection for the 3rd Sunday Father Pollard quotes Daniel Defoe (in The True Born Englishman) “wherever God erects a house of prayer,/the Devil always builds a Chapel

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Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



there". And, he says: "I take these words to mean that we human beings, rather than Satan as such, always find a way of bringing the bad into the good. We do so because there is another house called the house of the human heart, and it's a divided house. Our divided heart tarnishes all things good with a measure of bad. We bring weakness into the House of God. That wouldn't be so awful if we were "humble sinners" says Pollard "but we are prideful and we are pushy. Our pride and our pushiness take wing and do not rest until God's house has a Devil's Chapel in it. We make God's House a carbon copy of our divided heart."

That's what happened to God's Temple in Jerusalem in Sunday's Gospel story.

I can't help thinking that Saints Cosmas and Damian, the Medical Doctors, who gave their lives to the sick and were martyred for their Catholic Faith (whose Station Church in Rome features in my Podcast for Thursday 11 March) could teach us about the priorities that are at the heart of our Faith. We cannot allow Satan to have a little Chapel in it.

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