

Lent 3 - Year B - March 4, 2018

You have heard me use this expression: “We are on a Lenten journey.” On the first Sunday of Lent we traveled with Jesus as he was tempted in the desert. Last Sunday, we traveled with Jesus as he climbed a mountain and was transfigured in the sight of Peter, James, and John. Today, we travel with Moses in the first reading as he climbs the mount to receive the ten commandments and with Jesus as he travels to the temple to clean it up. In a way, we are on a virtual pilgrimage, a virtual tour with Jesus as he journeys from place to place, situation to situation, encounter to encounter.

So, I invite you to come with me on a virtual sightseeing trip as we watch what Jesus is doing. This temple event must have been some scene. Filled with rage, Jesus makes a whip, actually uses it and chases people out of the temple. All four gospel writers include this story and one of the gospel writers cites Jesus as chastising the people for having made the temple into a den of iniquity.

As part of this virtual tour, I invite you to go to a different temple. We believe that each one of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit. So, on our virtual tour, let’s enter our own personal temples. What would Jesus find there? The physical temple that he entered contained money changers, vendors of sacrificial animals, and other vendors all meant originally to help people when they came to the temple to offer sacrifice. But their efforts degraded over the years, and the focus of their work changed.

Jesus decided that it was time to clean house in the temple. Would Jesus want to clean house in our personal temples? There may be stuff in our personal temples that began as something worthwhile or even innocent that has infused our lives.

For example, when does chit-chat become gossip? When does caring for another become lust? What about those programs or activities that become so all-embracing that they move us to forget our true responsibilities to our families, and perhaps to our church? What about the so-called “white lies” that suddenly morph into something much more serious? What about the admiration for the other person’s possessions that emerges into jealousy? What about the foul language, used, perhaps to get a laugh, that suddenly is now part of one’s ordinary vocabulary? What about our efforts to become our own person that have changed us into self-seeking, selfish adult brats? What about the activities that have

replaced Sunday worship? Have your well-intentioned efforts to assist your children, assist your spouse, or assist your friend actually enabled them to persist in their bad or immature behavior? In other words, is there fodder in our lives, in our temples that Jesus would want to clean up and clean out in our virtual tour with him?

So, how do we take the initiative to do our own cleaning? Where is the answer? Remember the other part of our journey this week. We need to travel with Moses and get those ten commandments. Right. Commandments never sound like fun, but really, if truly followed, they will enable us to have a full, rich, enjoyable, and even fun-filled life. Observance of the ten commandments will allow us to have a spring cleaning of our temples as we have never experienced before.

I would like to focus on one commandment, often glossed over, the one that you are observing at this very moment: keeping holy the sabbath, worshipping God on Sunday. In my almost 48 years of priesthood, I have heard, I think, every possible excuse for not coming to Mass on Sundays. Most of them are excuses, not reasons. Most also declare that something else is more important than Sunday worship. Why insist on Sunday worship? We need focus in our lives. Without focus, we become scattered and spiritually dead. Nothing can replace Sunday community Eucharist as a means to find focus in our lives.

Today, we pray that with the guidance of the 10 commandments we can clean up our temples and in this celebration of the Eucharist find the strength to travel with Jesus today and every day of our lives.