

3rd Sunday of Lent – I don't know how many of you would have grown up with it, but in our home the Season of Spring marked the beginning of Spring Cleaning. Curtains off the windows, washed and put outside to dry and freshen up; cleaning the windows, cupboards and everything else. As a kid growing up, Mom & Dad would do the heavy work, but we kids had the responsibility of sorting thru our bedrooms and cleaning them, getting rid of the clutter and starting all over. I could never figure out why I had to take everything out of the dresser drawers and wipe them out since – how could they get dusty or dirty since the drawers are kept closed? I also was, sort of, in charge of cleaning the garage and much of the basement from the grime that collected over the winter months. I'm not sure Spring Cleaning is as big a thing today as it was back then. Since we all have busy schedules, maybe we tackle one room at a time whenever our schedules permit it.

Since the Season of Lent takes place during the Spring-time of the year, it's a good way to look at the Spiritual side of our lives and consider what needs cleaned out so as to get a fresh start and be more in line with the ways of God.

The excerpt from Exodus reminds us of the physical slavery that the Jewish people experienced in Egypt for 430 years and how God saved them. God also gives them a set of guidelines (Commandments) to teach them the mutual respect they owe to one another and to God, Himself. Whenever we adhere to His teachings, we allow ourselves to be freed from slavery to sin.

St John places his account of Jesus cleansing the Temple at the beginning of the public life of Jesus, whereas the other Gospel writers place it at the end, just before His passion. When it occurred isn't the important point here. What is important is what all four Gospel writers record. Their intentions, all similar, focus on the actions of Jesus as one of the final straws in His irritation of the authorities. Such an attack on Temple practices would be viewed as blasphemous by them and would push them into arresting Jesus.

John is concerned throughout his Gospel to portray Jesus replacing the great symbols of Israel's past with His own person. What more central symbol was there in the people's belief than that of the Temple? Here was celebrated the very presence of God, originally in the form of the tablets of the Ten Commandments handed down to Moses as the expression of the Lord's covenant with His people. For John this replacement of the Temple by the person of Jesus will lead ultimately to His passion, death and Resurrection, but John wants his readers to be aware of this transformation as they read the rest of the Gospel.

The timing of the event is significant. It is just before the start of the celebration of Passover, the occasion in which the freedom of the people from slavery is celebrated. Jesus in His person will be the freedom of those who follow Him. As St Paul points out – madness and foolishness to the Jews and Greeks, but for those who follow Christ the very power and wisdom of God.

The point that Jesus wishes to make is that the people had lost sight of the real meaning of the Temple. Treating it as a commercial thoroughfare, they no longer placed God's commandments at the center of their lives. As Jesus cleanses

the abuses, He also tries to get them to see Himself as the new center of their relationship with God – not so much with the stone and mortar Temple, but a new relationship with God, Himself, as the center. It is through their allegiance and fidelity to God that they will be renewed and cleansed.

The Lenten Journey challenges you and me to ask ourselves: where is Christ in our lives? Is He number one, or do other preoccupations take precedence? Do we have time for Him or do we let our daily concerns, activities and practices leave him little, if any, time or space? If our relationship with Christ is central, then the way we deal with the business of life will flow from that and we will have a better sense of peace and direction. If we try to work the other way – bringing Christ into our lives as secondary or a last resort – then we will find ourselves lost and confused. Sometimes we are like the people of Jesus' day – we lose sight of what our Baptism calls us to be. Like them we, too, place demands on God / making Him continually prove Himself to us. We insist on miracles. Paul cautions the new believers of Corinth not to second-guess God's desire to be good to them. We, also, must be faithful despite feelings that can lead us to doubt God's love.

We continue to stretch, abuse and otherwise ignore the First Commandment by setting our wants and desires, our comforts and pleasures ahead of what God wants. In setting our priorities we let our relationship with our community of faith and our temple go astray. We do have to truthfully ask ourselves – Have we made God more important than our families, than our jobs, than our pleasures, than our own very lives? Or, do we still make excuses to miss Mass, not participating with God's family, not making quality time for our children or our spouses? Do we still make excuses for not utilizing a God-given gift in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Whether it is Spring Cleaning at our homes or not, a cleansing of our hearts, mind and souls should be ongoing every day of our lives. We do this with a daily examination of conscience and a sincere act of contrition. Let us turn to Him Who will guide us in His ways, free us from slavery to sin, and reward us with true freedom.

