

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 3rd SUNDAY OF LENT (B)
Exodus 20: 1-17 Psalm 19 I Cor. 1: 22-25 John 2: 13-25
By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

PRENOTE:

We have a new feature on our preaching webpage. Ms. Karen Jessee, OP, a member of the Dominican Laity, has written poetic responses to the psalms. We will be posting a new poem every few weeks. Go to our webpage <https://PreacherExchange.com> and click on “Face to Face.”

As I travel preaching I see a lot of images of Christ in churches, schools, retreat houses, homes, etc. Many of them I rarely look at twice – they seem so milk toast. I find it hard to imagine the Jesus depicted in those statues and paintings causing problems for civil or religious authorities. He just seems so pleasant and, to be quite frank, soft. What could there ever be about him that would make anyone one want to put him to death? Yet, Jesus is the one who wrestled with Satan in the desert and came out a victor. In today’s gospel he goes into the temple precincts, drives out the merchants and overturns the money changers’ tables. Hardly a milk toast!

So, I am happy to reflect on today’s scriptural painting of Jesus, because in it we come face to face with Jesus’ fury. He has fire in his belly! Here is someone who matches the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures and his immediate predecessor John the Baptist. Here is someone whose words and actions will get him killed. What has gotten Jesus so enraged?

The merchants and money changers were there in the temple precincts to perform a legitimate service, especially at Passover time. Many pilgrims traveled great distances for the feast and, instead of bringing an animal with them from home, they could purchase one at the Temple. Money changers were important because the pilgrims needed to exchange their foreign coins for the half shekel, the only acceptable coinage for Temple worship. Greek and Roman coins had images on them and some had inscriptions declaring Caesar divine. These would be considered blasphemous and were forbidden in the Temple. So, the merchants and money changers performed an important service. What then was the problem?

In earlier times these stalls were further away, near the Mount of Olives and in the

Kidron Valley. But then the merchants were allowed to bring their wares into the temple area – creeping commercialism. These merchants had a good business and Jesus' anger may suggest they cheated their customers, the devout who came to worship. As he drove out the merchants and money changers, did you notice he treated those who sold doves less severely? To them he said, "Take these out of here and stop making my Father's house a market place." Doves were the required offering of the poor (Lv. 5:7), so Jesus may have been showing his usual deference to the poor.

At this point I get to wondering about: casino nights and money games at church bazaars and fund raisers and the Bingo sign at a church I pass that's larger than the sign for the name of the church. The neighbors call it "St. Bingo Parish."

I am currently preaching at a parish, and I asked the pastor his thoughts. He said when people enter the church they should first see Christian symbols in the vestibule, not a lineup of card tables with wares and raffle tickets for sale. He acknowledged the need to raise money for good causes, but at his parish these are outside the church building. He also thought there should be fewer restrictive signs posted on the bulletin boards and old announcements, which clutter, should be removed. People should feel welcome when they come through the door. He is working on getting the ushers to act as greeters before Mass and not think of themselves just as money collectors. In addition, the poor, he said, should be greeted in the same way the more established are.

Jesus, in "cleansing" the Temple, is fulfilling what a long line of prophets had promised. Tobit (14: 7-10) and Zechariah (14:1-20) anticipated a time when there would be no commerce in the Temple. Jewish pilgrims went to the Temple for cleansing and purification rituals before Passover. Now, Jesus has come to cleanse the Temple itself, for he brings in his person a new place to encounter God. Jesus is the "house of God" and in him the promised time of fulfillment has arrived.

Frequently in John's gospel, Jesus refers to "my Father's house." In doing this he is showing his special relationship with God. The expression also connotes that, because of Christ's saving work, all who believe in him have access to God and to eternal life (14:2). Thus, Jesus refers to himself as the new Temple when he says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

The Temple cleansing is important and appears in each of the four gospels. John

changes the chronology of the event by placing it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The Synoptic gospels have it at the end of their narrative, right after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. In John, Jesus has just replaced the water with wine (2: 1-11); now the prophet Jesus enters the Temple and replaces it with himself and, in describing his death, predicts that he will "raise" the temple in three days. By placing the cleansing at the beginning of his gospel, John has introduced a theme that will flow throughout his narrative. Seeing the fulfillment of prophecies in Jesus' actions in the Temple, the reader will also notice further fulfillment of messianic hopes in this gospel. We will see Jesus give sight to the blind (the Creator's first gift of light); forgiveness to sinners (reconciling our first parents' turning away from God): living waters to believers (recalling Ezekiel's vision of healing waters flowing from the right side of the Temple – 47:1-3). Jesus will also raise the dead Lazarus to life, which will precipitate his own death and his rising on the third day – just as he predicted in today's passage.

Jesus reveals the righteous anger God feels when what is good and intended to help people gets infiltrated by human greed. While mercy is always available to those who seek it, still we cannot forget Jesus' indignation when he meets injustice and any restrictions on those seeking God. For example, a very poor person might not afford to make a donation to the Temple or offer a sacrifice there. While they wouldn't be barred from entering, still how could they not feel second class, less worthy of a hearing with God in comparison to those with means around them? Yet, in Christ, the poor and the last are the very privileged guests at God's table, honored and welcome by Christ in the "house of God."

FAITH BOOK

3rd SUNDAY OF LENT (B) MARCH 15, 2009

Exodus 20: 1-17 Psalm 19 I Cor. 1: 22-25 John 2: 13-25

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run.

*"Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins
people take home.*

From today's gospel reading:

Jesus found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep and doves, as well as
money changers seated there.

He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area...,

To those who sold doves he said, "Take those out of here, and stop making my
Father's house a marketplace."

Reflection:

Jesus reveals the righteous anger God feels when what is good and intended to help people gets infiltrated by human greed. While mercy is always available to those who seek it, still we cannot forget Jesus' indignation when he meets injustice and any restrictions on those seeking God.

So, we ask ourselves:

- Is there a welcome atmosphere at my parish church as people enter the building?
- Do I go out of my way to introduce myself to people at church and welcome them if they are visitors?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

"...we proclaim Christ crucified"

(1 Corinthians 1:22)

The Lenten Stations of the Cross offer a rich opportunity to see and "proclaim" Jesus, suffering today in our world. Many of our brothers and sisters walk the way of the Cross continuing the suffering of Jesus in their lives. We are all called to be the "Simon", or "Veronicas" today, knowing that what we lovingly do for each other, we truly do to Him.

1st Station - Pilate Condemns Jesus to Death

Pray for those on death row and work to end to death penalty.

2nd Station - Jesus Takes Up His cross

Encourage a family member, or friend who is suffering.

3rd Station - Jesus Falls the First Time

Prepare a meal for someone who is ill or homeless.

4th Station - Jesus Meets His Mother

Lend a listening ear to a friend in need.

5th Station - Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

Make a contribution of time or money to a parish ministry.

6th Station - Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Volunteer your time at a food bank, soup kitchen, or serve a Wake Interfaith

Hospitality Network or Moore Square meal.

7th Station - Jesus Falls a Second time

Offer kindness and respect to those who do minimum wage jobs.

8th Station - Jesus Talks with the Women

Offer assistance to a single parent, or visit an elderly neighbor.

9th Station - Jesus Falls a Third Time

Pray for families and victims of HIV/AIDS.

10th Station - Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

Boycott businesses that use sweatshop labor to manufacture clothing.

11th Station - Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Write to legislators in Congress to ban land mines and other weapons which target civilians.

12th Station - Jesus Dies on the Cross

Pray for the victims of violence. Pray for those who do violence. Pray for those who support violence.

13th Station - Jesus Is Placed in the Arms of His Mother

Turn off your television when violent shows come on.

14th Station - Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Visit someone who is home-bound or in a nursing home.

***"We adore you Oh Christ and we bless you,
because by Your holy cross, you have redeemed the world."***

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might

consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Johnny R. Daughtry #0099090 (On death row since 10/4/93)
- George C. Buckner #0054499 (10/8/930)
- James E. Williams #0441726 (11/3/93)

Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

"First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, [Click Here](#).

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,
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