

Third Sunday of Lent: Ex 20:1-17. 1 Cor 1:22-25. Jn 2:13-25.

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The Gospel on Sunday will be this:

Jn 2:13-25.

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 He found in the temple area those who sold oxen,

sheep, and doves, as well as the money-changers seated there.

15 He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, 16 and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." 17 His disciples recalled the words of scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 22 Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his

disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to

believe the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. 23 While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. 24 But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, 25 and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

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The first reading will be this:

Ex 20:1-17.

Then God delivered all these commandments: 2 "I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. 3 You shall not have other gods besides me. 4 You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; 5 you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation; 6 but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain. For the LORD will not leave unpunished him who takes his name in vain. 8 "Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. 9 Six days you may labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. 11 In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth,

the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

12 Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you. 13 You shall not kill. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him."

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The second reading will be this:

1 Cor 1:22-25.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike,

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

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MEDITATION:

The Gospel this Sunday is of Jesus kicking up quite a fuss in the temple of Jerusalem.

It's unpleasant when someone shouts out criticism, but there is a time when loving involves standing up strongly for what's right. If someone around you could do with correction, do you always have the courage to speak out? Lent is a time for examining ourselves and cleaning up our hearts in preparation for Easter. Christ wants to dwell in each one of us, and in that sense, we're his temple, but is it kept well?

The Gospel this Sunday is about Jesus criticising the way the Temple in Jerusalem had been turned into a 'market place' ('a den of thieves'). The offering of religious sacrifices and oblations is a good gesture that Jesus isn't denouncing, but his criticism is actually because of the way people's faith had become a cold fulfilment of such customs, rather than a true gesture of personal love for the person of God. The first reading from Exodus lists off the Ten Commandments. The second reading of St Paul talks about how all of this is backed up by a saviour who allows himself to be crucified.

That crucifixion gets the message very strongly across. When someone criticises past mistakes and gives instructions for the future, it may seem ugly, but it may be done out of a very strong love. The world has plenty of annoying people who try to 'lay down the law', but some may be sticking their necks out in order to help. That's the way God chooses, even if it means getting his neck cut off (crucified). But thanks be to God for that!

In my short medical experience, I came across plenty of people with lung diseases, and step one has to be to advise them to give up the fags (cigarettes)! Is that some simple cold advice or a strong exhortation? If it's someone for whom you really care, then the exhortation is certainly strong. We are sons and daughters for whom God really cares - even to the point of Calvary - so that's worth saying thanks for today (Eucharist).

It's relevant how the Gospel begins: 'Since the Passover of the Jews was near'. The celebration of the Passover of Holy Week is certainly near for us this year, and some coming year you and I will also be 'passing' -

to Life after Death. That's worth celebrating! And it's worth really appreciating how our loving God goes to the trouble of getting the Good News message across. Maybe it's worth helping Him!!!

St Agustin asked the congregation at mass - "Perhaps we Christians sing nice hymns, but do our lives sing the same tune as our mouths?". Self examination is very important. A moderately bad man is aware that he has done wrong, but a really bad man may have done evil and thinks he's done alright! We say "sorry for what I've done wrong", and that may refer to one or two things in the last few weeks, but we then say "And for what I've failed to do", and that may be a much longer list and deserve much more thought! 'He who's aware of a good deed that should be done but doesn't do it is sinning.' (Jm 4:49) That makes a long list!

I remember in Charles Dicken's novel 'Great expectations', Mrs Havisham who had her love affair problems lived in a dark mansion and didn't want to let the light in to remind her. As far as she was concerned, love had stopped and so had 'life'. She ended up falling by mistake into the fireplace and died. So let's let 'the light' into our minds to bring back our memories, not so we fall into a fire of shame, but so that we can fix up our house! Be open to God's correction. The Bible puts it well to Moses in Deuteronomy 7:5. Referring to the long trek that the people had to make towards the 'promised land', it says "Know that I was training you like a man trains his child". The time of lent comes from that training trek.

Of course, in examining our lives, it's not good to become paranoid and exaggerate problems and faults, but it's not good to underestimate and ignore things either. Think of an iceberg before a ship. Very little may be visible, but if you see a small sheet of ice on the sea surface, then it's just the tip of a much bigger block underneath, and that may be very dangerous, as the Titanic liner found out! Think of how a beautiful statue can emerge from a rock: the rock has to be chipped - and God is a good sculptor! Imagine if a statue started saying "Get lost! That hurts!"! So let's allow God to chip at us!

Examining our consciences may be challenging, but it's for a good reason. As the letter to the Hebrews says: 'God treats you as sons. For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards. Besides this, we have had our earthly parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not then submit all the more to the Father of spirits and live? They disciplined us for a short time as seemed right to them, but he does so for our benefit, in order that we may share his holiness. At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it. So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed.' (Heb 12:7-13).

This discipline is the reason for lent.

Dara.

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