

March 4th 2018 – 3rd Sunday of Lent

When I stand up like that by the podium on that step, it reminds me of when I was a deacon in Milwaukee, at St. Anthony's. They have the old fashion pulpit with stairs that go way up. You're standing there looking down on all these people and you feel so powerful... I was only a deacon for one Mass there, but still I'll always remember that.

There was a little girl, she'd never been to church before. One day her Dad, finally, was prevailed upon to take her. She sat through Mass and she was very calm, watching everything. After Mass when they were going out, her father looked at her and said, "What did you think?" She said, "I liked the music but the commercial was way too long."

Jesus is in the temple for Passover. At the time of Passover, there were easily between one and two thousand people coming from outside the city, going to the temple. There were over 100,000 four legged animals. God knows how many birds that would be offered for sacrifice. These animal salespeople would be trying to sell these animals. Because if you lived a long way away, you couldn't drag your animal all the way there. But what they were doing was, telling the people that brought their own animals, "Your animals aren't good enough, you've got to buy ours." Then they would take your animal and charge you an arm and a leg for theirs and then later on, they would resell your animal. The money changers. This is the Roman Empire. Everybody that was under the Roman Empire had Roman coins with the image of Caesar on them. For the Jews, that was idolatry to have a graven image. It wasn't allowed to be used to pay the temple fees or the temple tax or anything in the temple. So, they had to exchange it for temple money, which looked just like a slug, there was nothing on it. But in doing so, the money changers were charging exorbitant transaction fees. Even the poor were having a hard time paying these fees. That's where Jesus comes upon in the gospel. Now, to understand what the temple meant to Jews was this: It was the center of the universe, it was the gateway to heaven, and the gateway to sheol or the abode of the dead for people that wait and couldn't go anywhere else. It was where the Garden of Eden had existed before. It was everything. It was where you communicated with God because God lived there in the temple, nowhere else. Synagogues are just places for religious education and for people to listen to the readings and get a homily. The temple was everything in their lives. They were required to go to the temple at least three times a year, if they could. This temple represented Jewish life to the max. Without the temple they'd feel lost, even to today, they believe the temple will come back. That's why the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is so important, because it is the original wall left from the temple that was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans. That's why they go there and pray because they feel that's where God is at, the most. The temple was a building that sat on 35 acres. Take all of our land going that way from the big dirt pile to the fence and go back to the railroad tracks. One building covered that whole area. Yes. And for 46 years they were still working on it. So, I don't want any complaints on the time it takes us to get our little church. Okay? So, for 46 years they were working on it. This is how the temple was; there were a bunch of courts, or sections. As you went in each court, you went higher and higher and higher, if you were allowed to. You went up the steps and there was the *court of gentiles*. Anybody that wanted to pray to God or believed in the God of the Jews, could stand there. If you were a gentile, that was as far as you went because to go any further was to be killed. You could not go any further. Next, you went up through a beautiful gate to the *court of women*. Any Israelite could be there, but again, that was as far as women could go. Then, you had to go

through this big door if you were men, that took twenty guys to open and close it, it was so heavy, made of bronze. This was the *court of Israelites*. The men could worship there and would have to stop. Then if you were a priest, you went into the *court of the priests*, and that's as far as they went. Except, for one time of the year, in the back of the *court of the priests* was this huge curtain, one seamless curtain. (This is the curtain that was torn in two at the time of Jesus' death.) This curtain blocked off the *Holy of Holies*. Now, in the *court of priests* you had a big altar, naturally, to sacrifice the animals; blood, fat, all this was there. You had another smaller altar where you offered incense. Then you had a table with the holy bread. Then, you came to the curtain. Once a year, the high priest, that had been chosen high priest that year during Pentecost, could go behind the curtain to the *thrown of God*, and offer worship, mainly incense. Because it was so holy and it revered God so much, because it was *The Thrown of God*, the high priest would tie a rope around his ankle, so if he did something wrong and God struck him dead, the other priests could pull him out without being killed. That's the way the temple was; you kept going up and up and up, because where's God? Up. This was the temple. Where were the money changers, where were the animals? In the *court of the gentiles*. They were blocking the gentiles from worshipping and the money thieves were keeping the poor from being able to worship, and they were getting in the way of anybody else that wanted to worship. So Jesus quotes, "you have made my Father's house a den of thieves." He was furious. You were not allowed to take a weapon into the temple, so Jesus made a whip out of the cords he found around. He started whipping the animals into a frenzy. Can you imagine? A hundred thousand animals stampeding; goats, sheep, cows, all going crazy. Then, sacrilege, he turned over the money tables. Money is rolling everywhere. Can you imagine that scene? The gospel writers missed a tremendous opportunity to give us details. We all know, in the movies when money flies out of something, do the people just stand there and watch it? No, they go flying after it. So you probably have animals running everywhere, people diving for money, and what's amazing is, and this is a miracle, the money changers the Pharisees, the religious leaders, they did not call the temple police. They just stood there and said, "What sign can you give us for doing all this?" If my money was rolling across the floor, I'm not going to be standing there saying, "Hey, give me a sign as to why you do this." So there is all this catastrophe going on, all this mess going on, all this chaos, and Jesus is red faced. Righteous anger. There's two kinds of anger, righteous anger and sinful anger. Ninety-nine percent of the time we have sinful anger. Once in a while we get righteous. Jesus was trying to make it easy for people to worship. But at the same time, he was challenging the religious leaders by saying, "Hey, why are you Jewish? Why are you saying you're God's people if you don't worship Him? You worship money." Because they were getting tremendous kickbacks; the priests, the religious leaders at the time. Jesus was giving them a chance to say, "Hey look, why are you Jewish?" But since that time, we know there are other temples. We have a temple right here. Saint Michael the Archangel has a tabernacle with God in it. We go up, there's God. All Catholic churches with a tabernacle, are temples. We have the ability to go somewhere else, we don't have to go to Washington D.C. to the National Basilica to worship, God is here. We ask ourselves along the same lines, "Why am I Catholic? Why am I Christian? Why do I go to the temple?" Then, what do I tell the people when they come to my front door and say, "Let's talk." The Mormons, the Jehovah Witnesses and those people. What do we say? Do we know why we're Catholic? Do we have an answer? Or are you like my Grandfather who was not Catholic or Baptist or nothing. When they came to the door he would look at them and say, "We're all Catholic here." Slam the door. It worked... but it's not a very good response. So when Jesus does this, he is making a scene and saying, "Guys, look, why are we worshipping God, why are we who we are?" We are proud, I hope, that we are Catholic.

We're proud that we are followers of Christ. But why? Why are we doing this? It's a wonderful thing to think about during Lent.

The other thing is, there's another temple and Jesus said this in the gospel. He said, "destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up." His body. As members of God's family as being baptized, confirmed, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Are we treating our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit? Or, are we abusing them; too much alcohol, too many drugs, too much food. What are we doing? Are we doing a little exercise, are we walking, if we can? Are we at least going out and sitting in the sun for ten minutes to get our vitamin D? Do we treat our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit? Saint Francis of Assisi ran into this problem, because after thirty-one of his thirty-three years, he beat his body, he treated it like it was the most evil thing on the planet. Then he realized he was wrong. His body should have been taken care of. So for the next two years, he apologized to his body. "I'm sorry I beat you, I'm sorry I did this." But Jesus gives us two points to think about in our gospel during the rest of the season of Lent. Why am I Christian, why am I Catholic? And, am I really truly taking care of this body as the temple of the Holy Spirit that will be with me when I get to heaven?

God bless you.