

The Third Sunday in Lent

(Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Exodus 20:1-17
<i>Response</i>	Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 1:22-25
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 2:13-25

The Third Sunday in Lent for Year B continues our journey toward the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus with an episode that's not from Mark's gospel. This is another one of those occasions when the Church is going to insert a passage from the Gospel of John into Year B so that we can hear from the fourth gospel. This is something that happens a lot during Lent and Easter, and so the third Sunday of Lent is one of those times, and it's the famous story of Jesus' so-called cleansing of the temple. So in the Gospel of John 2, John gives us an account of Jesus' actions with a specific focus on how what Jesus did in the temple pointed forward to his death and resurrection. So we're going to look at those verses, it's John 2:13-25, and try to break them down. So the gospel for this week says this:

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews

then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he spoke of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.¹

Alright, we'll stop there. There is a lot going on here in this account, so let's walk through it and hit some key points. First, notice when it takes place. Twice John emphasizes for you that this takes place at the time of the Jewish Passover. So if you go back to the Old Testament, Leviticus 23, Exodus 12, the Passover was the feast that not only celebrated the exodus from Egypt and the deliverance from Pharaoh, but it was also celebrated each year in the spring, some time around March or April. So if you think about this, when John says it was Passover time, he's telling you it was spring time. So there's already a connection for you between the passage and our own remembrance of this text during Lent, right. So we too are, in a sense, preparing for the great Passover of Easter. That's the first connection there, a liturgical connection.

The second element of the account we want to emphasize here is the reason Jesus turns the tables of the money changers over and he drives them out with a whip. Alright, I mean this is serious here. Why would Jesus do that? What's the rationale here? Well, although many people kind of assume, or even assert, that the money changers are cheating people and that's the primary reason that Jesus is upset with them, you notice that the Gospel of John doesn't actually say that, and there's a reason for that. First, as far as we know, the money changers in the temple were there to perform a legitimate service, which would be to take the coinage of people who were coming from all over the world, and change it out for the Jerusalem coinage, so that people could buy sacrifices: oxen, sheep, turtledoves. These were the kinds of animals that could be offered and sacrificed in the temple. So the moneychang-

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

ers are actually performing an important service to help the pilgrims who would come for Passover. The first century Jewish historian Josephus actually tells us that Passover is such a great festival of pilgrimage for the Jewish people, that up to 1 million Jews would converge on the city of Jerusalem. And so many of them were coming from far away so they couldn't bring their animals with them in order to sacrifice them. It would be too difficult or the animal might be injured on the way. So what they would do is they would buy clean animals for sacrifice when they got to the city. So the money changers are performing that important service for the Jewish pilgrims, so that they can buy sacrifices and have them offered in the temple.

So the problem is not really the presence of the moneychangers in Jerusalem, nor is it clear that they're cheating anyone. But the real issue seems to be where they are doing the selling. That is, they're doing it in the temple complex itself, and that's why Jesus says, "Stop making my father's house a house of trade." So what most scholars think here is that the Jewish moneychangers have set up their tables in what was called the outer court of Herod's Temple. When Herod had expanded the temple — King Herod — he made an outer court for the Gentiles so that pagans could come and also worship the God of Israel in the outer court, which they did, because there were many pagans, called God-fearers, who believed that the Jew's God was the true God, and would come to the temple to worship him, to venerate him, and what not. So what happens here is that these moneychangers are effectively robbing the Gentiles of the ability to come and pray in the house of the father. And so Jesus drives them out and says stop making my father's house a house a trade, because you can't pray in a marketplace. You can't pray whenever you're surrounded by oxen, and sheep, and goats bleeding, and just the noise, and the busyness, and the bustle of a marketplace. So Jesus here wants to purify and cleanse that sacred space that was set apart, that was holy. In Hebrew, the word holy, *qadosh*, means set apart. This place was set apart for prayer for the nations, and they are turning it into a market instead. So that's, I think, the real reason for the action of Jesus. And you can see the disciples kind of pick up on that when it says the disciples remembered the Psalm. Psalm 69 which says, "zeal for your house has consumed me." In other words, Jesus loves the temple so much he can't bear to see its holiness desecrated by turning it into just one more market.

So when he does this, something important happened here. It says that the Jews came to him and said, "Well what sign do you have to give us for doing this?" Now I want you to pause here for just a second; notice the language of "the Jews." One of the interesting things about John's Gospel is that you'll frequently see this language of "the Jews", and you need to be careful that we don't read this anachronistically. In other words, when we talk about "the Jews," we mean a particular religious group, right, who celebrate certain laws and festivals, who accepts the Hebrew Bible as their scriptures, and so and so forth. So we mean it as a religious identity, but at the time of Jesus — this is the first century A.D. — you have to keep it in context here. Remember, Jesus himself is a Jew, right; the apostles are Jews. So the word here for "the Jews," a number of scholars have pointed out, is literally *oi Ioudaioi* in Greek, it means the Judeans. It means the people of the South, the people especially of Jerusalem; as opposed to the Galileans, which Jesus and his disciples would've been referred to as Galileans. So both Galileans and Judeans are Jews. They all celebrate the same festivals, they all keep the same religious beliefs, they belong to the same religion, as we would say, but they're from the north and the south. And there are tensions throughout John's Gospel between Galileans and Judeans, or between the disciples of Jesus and the Jews. So just keep that in mind here.

So what happens here is the Judeans, which is probably a reference to the residents of Jerusalem, especially the chief priests, Sadducees, that kind of people who are in charge of the temple, come to Jesus and say, "Excuse me, what's your justification for doing this? What sign do you give us?" And Jesus says a riddle, he says, "Destroy this house in three days, I'll raise it up." Now they take him literally to be referring to the house of the temple, which was believed to be the house of God. And they say, "Well hold on, it's taken 46 years to build this temple and you're gonna raise it up in three days?" Now notice something interesting about that. When they say 46 years, that's a specific reference to the building activities of King Herod the Great, who was king when Jesus was born, who massacred the infants in Bethlehem, and who killed his wife, and several of his children. I mean he was a wicked, evil king. Although the temple had actually been rebuilt in the fifth century B.C., it was called the second temple. Herod, when he became king, expanded it, and beautified it, and made it one of the wonders of the ancient world, precisely because he wanted people to think that he was the Messiah, that he was the legitimate king.

Because the Jews had prophecies that said when the Messiah would come, he would build a temple that was greater than Solomon's temple even had been, right. And the second temple that had originally been built after the exile by Ezra and Nehemiah was widely recognized as being a lesser temple when compared to Solomon's; it wasn't as glorious as Solomon's. So the prophets arose saying one day there would be a great temple, a glorious temple, and Herod tried to kind of bring that prophecy to fulfillment by expanding the temple at the time of Jesus' birth. And it continued to be under construction all the way after his death, up to the time of Jesus himself.

So when the Jews here say 46 years, they're referring to Herod's Temple, right. Now Jesus takes that opportunity to say what? Well destroy this temple and in three days I'm going to raise it up. So he's getting them to shift their focus from Herod's Temple to the actual temple that the prophets spoken of, namely the temple of his body. What does that mean, the temple of his body? Well it's real simple. From a first century Jewish perspective, the temple was nothing less than the dwelling place of God on earth. So when Jesus identifies himself as the true temple, what he's revealing is that he is the dwelling place of God on earth. That his only body is where God has come to dwell with us, to be with us, right. As John says elsewhere in chapter 1, verse 14:

...the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

Literally he pitched his tent among us. So it's a revelation once again of Jesus' divinity that also points forward to his resurrection because they are going to destroy the temple of his body, but on the third day he's going to rebuild it by being raised from the dead in the resurrection. So this is a really powerful, powerful sign that points forward to the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. And then John brings this to an end here by saying that when he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. So in other words, the disciples themselves didn't really get the point when Jesus said it to the Jews in Jerusalem. It was as much a riddle to the disciples as it was to Jesus' opponents. It was only after he was raised from the dead that they made the connection. Ah, he was talking about the temple of his body, he was talking about the temple of his body.

Alright, and then finally, in closing, you might wonder about those last couple of verses here, they're really mysterious. When it says that many believed in his name but Jesus didn't entrust himself to them because he knew what was within them, that appears to be a reference that runs throughout John's Gospel to the fact that Jesus was rejected by many of his own people. Especially the Southerners, especially the Judeans, especially the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who did not accept his claim of Messiahship, did not accept his claim to be the divine son of God, did not accept his claims to be the Messiah and would ultimately lead to his crucifixion. So it's kind of like a foreshadowing of the fact that Jesus is not going to give into their demands for a sign. He's not going to entrust himself to them because he knows already who's going to accept him, and who's going to reject him; because he can read the hearts of human beings, precisely because he is the dwelling place of God on earth, he is the temple in person.

Alright, with that said then, the Old Testament reading for today is from Exodus. And as I pointed out each week during the season of Lent, unlike ordinary time, we don't want to look for a connection, a direct connection, between the Old Testament reading and the Gospel, they're on two different tracks. And the first reading during Lent is always taking us through salvation history, through major events in the life of the people of Israel. So last Sunday we looked at the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. On this Sunday, the Church fast-forwards through salvation history to the time of the Exodus, the time of Moses and to the great moment when the Ten Commandments are given to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. So this is one of those times in the lectionary where we actually read the Ten Commandments, not in their shorter catechetical form, but in the biblical form. As we read through this first reading, what I want you to do is pay attention to the differences between the actual text of the Ten Commandments, and maybe the catechetical formula you learned in catechism class, you know, the shorter abbreviated form of them, and then we'll say a few things about the commandments. Alright, Exodus 20:1-17. This is a long one, but let's do it together. I'll read it out loud:

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."
"You shall have no other gods before me."

“You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.”

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

"You shall not kill.”

"You shall not commit adultery.”

"You shall not steal.”

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

Alright, I'll stop there. Okay, so what do we make of this? A couple points. Number one, notice that the Ten Commandments are expressly described as being the words of God, right, so they're unique. In a sense, elsewhere in the book of Exodus, it's going to say that when Moses gets the two tablets, that the Lord wrote what he calls the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments, with the finger of God. It was something that God himself directly reveals to the people of Israel. So they have pride of place in the Old Testament, as the direct words of God, as the revelation of God; that's the first thing. Second, notice the importance of the theme of holiness in the Ten Commandments. That word holy gets used a couple times, and in

Hebrew, the word holy means set apart. Set apart for God, set apart for some special purpose, set apart from sin, and for the Lord. So the Ten Commandments, in their essence, are really about holiness, how to be holy. God is calling his people to be a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, and the Ten Commandments are basically the code for living out a life of holiness.

Now we could do a whole course just on these Ten Commandments. In fact, the third part of the catechism, part three of the catechism, on the moral teaching of the Church, is entirely devoted to breaking down all ten of the commandments, and kind of drawing out the implications of each one of the commandments. But for our purposes here, I thought it might be interesting just to make two brief points that I found helpful in understanding the rationale behind these commandments. First, it's this, that the two tablets of the Ten Commandments are really tied to the two commandments of love: love of God and love of neighbor, right. So you recall in the gospels, Jesus says that the two greatest commandments are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus gets those two commandments really from the Decalogue. So if you look back at the text there, the first half of the Ten Commandments are really all about love of God.

So the first commandment, which is to have no other gods before him, means to love the Lord, to worship him and him alone. The second commandment, not to take his name in vain is also a commandment against blasphemy, against desecrating the holy name of God, which you would only do if you don't love him, if you don't revere him, if you don't respect him. The third of the first tablet is the commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, to rest on the Lord's day. And over time, it became the day also where you would go to the synagogue, or to hear his word, or go to the temple in order to worship him. So, in so far as worship is an expression of love, Sabbath rest and Sabbath worship became the kind of quintessential expression of loving God, of taking time to lay down the labors of life and focus an entire day on your relationship with God through prayer, through hearing his word, and through worship. So the first tablet is all about loving God. So if you want to learn how to love God, you need to not worship other gods, you need to not take his name in vain, and you need to honor the Sabbath, and keep it holy, and rest, and worship him.

The second half of the Decalogue, if you look at all those commandments, are really about the love of neighbor. They're teaching us how both to love our neighbor positively, as when it says honor your father and mother, and what not to do if we want to show love for our neighbor. So we shall not kill, or commit adultery, or steal, or lie, bear false witness, or covet our neighbor's spouse or any of our neighbor's possessions. And so as we go through all of that, you know, one of the things you'll notice about the Ten Commandments is that, many of them, most of them, are formulated negatively, like, don't do this, don't do that. Well, one of the things I found helpful in trying to understand the rationale is to formulate them positively in terms of holiness. What are they really about? I would suggest to you that they are about the holiness of God, and also the holiness of our neighbor, and of certain aspects of human life.

So if you have the handout for this week, you can kind of look through this. I would say, for example number one, the first commandment against idolatry is really about the holiness of God. Like, that God himself is set apart, and only he is to be worshiped. The second commandment against blasphemy is about the sanctity, or the holiness of God's name. In other words, God's name is set apart and we shouldn't take it in vain. We shouldn't use it in a curse or in a profane way. We shouldn't just take it in vain, in a sense of being flippant about its use. We need to treat it with reverence, we need to treat it with respect. And to do anything less than that is to fail to recognize it as holy. That's why we call it profanity. Something profane means something that's not holy, something that's not set apart, that's dirty or unclean. When we treat God's name as if it is just common or ordinary, we take something holy and we profane it. The third commandment on Sabbath worship, that's really about the sanctity of time. You might not think about this, this one's particularly hard for us in the modern-day. We think that time is just secular, everything is this-worldly. The only meaning time has is the meaning it has for us in this world. But by saying that this particular day, the seventh day is holy, what God's teaching us is that there is a sanctity of time. That time itself is holy and that the time that we give to him in rest and worship is set apart. So that if we treat that seventh day, as if it's just any other ordinary day, what we are doing is desecrating it, we're in a sense profaning it. And so he's trying to show us that there's more to time than just this world. There's an eternity waiting for us, and so he gives us the

Sabbath as a kind of foretaste of the eternal rest that we hopefully will all enter into.

I bring this up because, you know, one of the things that we struggle with the most in the contemporary church is the lack of mass attendance, right. Catholics don't go to mass. And if you're watching these videos, you're probably going to mass on a regular basis. But there are lots of Catholics who don't, and it can be difficult to explain why we should go to mass. And I would say that the Sabbath commandment here is a very helpful explanation, because it gives us, it helps us to see that time itself is holy, right, it's been set apart, it's consecrated. So for example, if you take the wine and the bread of the Eucharist right before they're consecrated, before they're made holy by the words of consecration by the priest, if we were to take the wine that's going to be used in the Eucharist and spill it, or pour it out, it wouldn't be a big deal because it's just wine. But once it's consecrated, once it's set apart, it's holy. And if I knowingly and willingly desecrated it, that would be a sin, it would be a grave sin, right. Well what's the difference? The difference is now that wine or that bread has been set apart as holy. The same thing is true about the Sabbath. What makes not worshiping God on Sunday, or not resting on the seventh day, what makes it a sin is because God is the author of time. He set that time apart and so if we take it and treat it as if it's ordinary, we effectively desecrate it. If we take what he has consecrated and say it doesn't matter, it doesn't have any significance, it's not set apart, it's just like any other day, and what's more important is my work, or my money, or whatever I feel like doing, then we're basically desecrating and profaning that holy time. And that's really hard for us to get our brains around these days because we're so influenced by secularism. The word *secula* means world or age. What it's saying is that this world is all there is, and there's nothing sacred about time, everything is secular. So that's the first tablet of the Ten Commandments. I hope that gives you a little bit of insight.

And the same thing's true about the second tablet. You go through each one of them. Why should I honor my father and mother? Well because fatherhood and motherhood is holy. Your father and mother are set apart. They're the ones who gave you life. No one else has ever given you a gift like that. So they merit your respect, they merit your honor, because of the sanctity of fatherhood and motherhood. Same thing about the commandment against murder. Why shouldn't I kill

another human being? Because of the sanctity of human life, right. This is something that's set apart. It's different, it's not like the animals, right, it's not like the plants. God has set this particular gift of life apart and we don't have the right to just take it and treat it as if it's profane and treat it as if it has no meaning, or it has no value. So the sanctity of motherhood and fatherhood, the sanctity of human life. What about adultery? Same thing. The reason it's a sin is because of the sanctity of matrimony, right. When a man and a woman marry one another, they set themselves apart for the other. They become holy, set apart from every other man and woman, and set apart for one another. So what adultery does is it desecrates the holiness of matrimony, the holiness of marriage. Same thing with theft. It's about the sanctity of private property. If something belongs to someone else, it's set apart for that person and I don't have the right to just take it from them because I want it.

And then finally, even with regard to bearing false witness, this is about the sanctity of speech that God has set apart humanity, given us the gift of speech, so that we can speak the truth. There's a certain holiness to speech. It's unique to us as human beings and we have to use it for the sake of the truth, and to use it to lie is basically to take this holy gift and desecrate it, to adulterate it, to use it for something God never intended it to be used for. We were given speech to praise God and speak the truth. And when we don't do that, we desecrate it, especially in a serious way like in a courtroom, where we might bear false witness, that can be a grave sin. And then finally the last commandments against coveting kind of sum up all the other ones, and just tell us that there's a sanctity to everything that belongs to someone else. Whether it's someone's spouse or someone's possessions, we are not to let that desire to covet even enter into our hearts. So we're not just supposed to not do something that desecrates someone else's possessions or adulterate someone else's spouse, but we should not even let that movement into the heart itself. So we have to be on guard against the sin of coveting another person's spouse or possessions.

So that's in essence what I think the Ten Commandments are all about. They're trying to show us how to be holy by giving to us principles about the holiness of God and the holiness of our neighbor. And it's in that context then that the Church moves to the Psalm. Psalm 19 is the bridge between the Old and the New Testament. It's one of my favorite Psalms in the Bible. It's a Psalm about the word of God, it's a Psalm about the law. And the refrain here is:

Lord you have the words of everlasting life.

And it goes on to just say certain things about the law of God. It says for example that the law is perfect, reviving the soul. It says that the precepts of God are right and that they rejoice the heart. It says that the commandments of God are not burdens, but they are “pure and enlightening the eyes.” And finally that the ordinances of God are true, and that they’re righteous altogether. In other words, the Psalm is trying to help us understand that the commandments of God are not shackles that are meant to make us his slaves, but rather they are lights that are meant to help us see the truth, help us to live in holiness. They’re truth in a world of lies and they are perfect. They are from God, and if we go to them they can actually revive our souls, they can refresh our souls. And so for me, at least personally, I think this Psalm in particular is just really powerful because I have experienced over the years of studying Scripture, that the more I immerse myself in Scripture, the more it does refresh my soul, right. It gives me wisdom, it gives me insight, and it also helps me to see more clearly. Like it says here, the commandments are enlightening to our eyes. Because let's face it, a lot of times we're blind. We're blind to our sins, we're blind to the evils in the world, we're blind to our faults. And immersion in the word of God, loving the word of God, coming to not just accept the commandments but ponder them and be grateful for them, meditate upon them and try to live them, is a way to actually find joy, and peace, and refreshment in this life.

So in closing, what I'd like to do is just encourage you. I know you probably all have memorized, you know, the formula of the Ten Commandments that we learned when we were kids, maybe you don't. If you don't, take some time to memorize them. But I also encourage you to mark this place in your Bible. Mark the actual form of the commandments, the words of God as given to us by Moses, and go back and take some time to meditate on them, reflect on them, and use them as a great tool for examining your conscience. Asking yourself as you read through them, where have I failed in love of God? Where have I failed in love of neighbor? How can I grow more in each of these areas so that I can live the two great commandments that Jesus gave us: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul mind and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.