

March 07, 2021
3rd Sunday of Lent
Ex 20:1-17
1 Cor 1:22-25
Jn 2:13-25

Whoah!!! Jesus got mad. Isn't anger a sin? I thought Jesus was fully human, like us in all things EXCEPT sin? What's going on here: Cracking a whip, overturning tables, and driving man and beast alike out of the Temple area and into the streets?

I don't know about you, but on more than a few occasions I've used this gospel passage to justify getting angry using the logic that righteous anger is OK. After all, Jesus did it. It's in the Bible. Of course I'm the one defining righteous when it comes to my own anger.

And boy, can I get righteously angry at many things—things like:

- The rot in our political system
- The bias in the news media
- Assaults on the sanctity of life in any and all of its stages
- War
- Terrorism
- Bullying
- Social injustice

I could go on and on, as I'm sure you can. I can even get righteously angry when people don't treat me the way I know I deserve to be treated. After all, I'm me!

But there's a fatal flaw in this logic. This anger that I define as righteous doesn't change anything. It's destructive, not constructive, and what

gets destroyed is me. It's my blood pressure that rises. It's my heart that pounds. It's my hand that hurts when I pound it on a table.

The gospel recalls the words of Scripture: "Zeal for Your House will consume Me". I suggest that what Jesus is demonstrating in today's gospel is not anger, but zeal. Jesus sees the Temple being misused, even defiled. He sees people being taken advantage of, perhaps even cheated. After all, captive markets generally don't make for fair prices or fair exchange rates. If you've

ever bought a drink on an airplane or changed currency in a hotel you know exactly what I'm talking about.

But Jesus doesn't just seethe with self-destructive anger over what's going on. Rather, He zealously does something about the injustice He sees taking place. He cleans up His Father's House. He purifies the Temple.

So I think the gospel is telling us that zeal for a righteous cause is OK. Anger is not OK.

Jesus' righteous cause is respect for the Temple, God's dwelling place on earth. The Temple must be kept clean and pure. Jesus even refers to His own body as a temple.

Maybe that's the real lesson for us in today's gospel. Each of us are a temple. We are temples for God's Holy Spirit, dwelling places for Him on earth. So before we get angry at world events around us or get angry at how the world may treat us, perhaps we should first look inwardly and get zealous about cleaning up each of our temples where God dwells.

That's a tall order to do on our own. Perhaps that's why God gives us the gift of Lent. Those ashes we got smeared on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday were both a reminder that we need to clean up our temple and an invitation to become zealous about actually doing just that.

Often in church we are invited to pray for the intentions of the Pope. What you may not know is that each month the Pope publicizes his intention for that month. Appropriate to today's gospel inviting us to clean up each of our temples is Pope Francis' intention for this month of March 2021: "Let us pray that we may experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God".

Why not use this Lent to reconcile any differences you may have with God? What better way to clean up your temple and prepare to greet THE Temple that will rise on the 3rd day?

Lord, please help each of us to zealously drive out the rot and the beasts and the greed that lie within us so that Your Spirit may find clean and pure temples in which to dwell. Please lead us to such a deep and complete reconciliation with You that we will taste nothing but the sweetness of Your infinite mercy.