



Third Week of Lent

March 15 through March 22, 2009

Journeying Through Lent

A Time To Develop zeal for God

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between them. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

Opening Ritual & Prayer

Light a candle. Open your Bible next to the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself & others after a hectic day.

Leader: Christ be our light

All: Shine in the darkness

Leader: Christ be our light

All: Shine in the world

Leader: Christ be our light

All: Shine in our lives each day

Read aloud to yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture readings for the Third Sunday of Lent (Year B):

Exodus 20: 1-17

1 Corinthians 1: 22-25

John 2: 13-25

Reflection

In Lent we are called to develop and practice the virtue of zeal for God.

The Gospel reading for the third Sunday of Lent startles us. It is confrontative not comforting. We often image Jesus as meek and humble of heart. We believe he was non-violent, after all he told his disciples to turn the other cheek. But in this Gospel text he comes across as Indiana Jones with whip in hand. Jesus is down right mad and angry.

Jesus lunges through the temple with a whip in his hand, driving out animals, turning over the moneychangers' tables spilling thousands of coins all over the place and yelling at the top of his lungs: Get out of here! You are turning my Father's house into a shopping mall, not a place of prayer. Jesus knew what it meant to be angry. Not the anger

that takes the next step toward violence. Violence is a sin and Jesus would never tolerate it.

But there is another kind of anger. It is that natural human emotion that boils up in our veins whenever we meet injustice and hypocrisy. This kind of anger is natural and keeps us from despair. Such anger can be the doorway to hope for it responds to what must not be and cannot be.

This is the kind of anger Jesus felt that day in the Temple. The money changers were in the Temple because people had to pay the Temple tax for sacrifices carried out each day. But pious Jews who came to the temple had coins minted with Roman images of the emperor or a deity in their wallets. They therefore had to exchange their coins for Jewish coins, the only ones acceptable in the Temple. This religious practice turned into a lucrative business since the money changers charged the people an exchange fee.

Ask Yourself

In our culture and world today, what activities, events or situations make you really angry?

Jesus' anger that day brought to fruition the prophecies of Zechariah and Jeremiah who maintained that in the days of the Messiah all will be holy in Jerusalem and no merchant will be found in the Temple. That's why Jesus' opponents were so upset with Jesus and demanded a sign or proof that he was indeed the Messiah. Jesus' response seems absurd to his opponents. "Destroy this temple [Jesus' body] and in three days I will raise it up." His listeners are thinking pragmatically devoid of faith: it took forty-six years to build the Temple, and he is going to destroy it and build it up in three days? Jesus' answer is laden with resurrection clues and images---and his disciples and believers will remember it after Jesus' death and resurrection. They will put the pieces together then. What happens to Jesus' body happens to the body of Christ, the temple of God now---in us, individually and collectively.

Jesus was zealous in defending God's house as a place of prayer. For what or whom are we zealous? Are we zealous for God's house for the public worship of God, and for God's honor and glory? Can we like Jesus quote the words of Psalm 69: "Zeal for your house consumes me." What really consumes us---time, work, money, worries, sports, children, acquiring things, marriage, and health? Jesus spoke of the Temple as his body.

How do we treat the Temple of our body, the Temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us? How do we treat the bodies of others: spouses, the elderly, the sick, the homeless, our enemies?

Ask Yourself

How do you express your zeal for justice and what is right, in the face of injustice and evil?

When Jesus was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered his words and actions in the Temple. We have been raised from the dead in baptism. What in this gospel reading do we need to remember and put into action so that Jesus is more present in our bodies, in our worship, and in our church?

Lent is a time to embrace the twofold challenge from the Gospel reading. First, we need to pay attention to the anger that lurks in us, and not let it fester like a sore or let it explode into violence. Second, we are invited to both pray for and practice the virtue of zeal for God so that it can consume us as it did Jesus.

Reflection Questions

- ✚ Do I need to examine the way I deal with anger?
- ✚ What strengthens my zeal?
- ✚ What weakens my zeal?
- ✚ How is my zeal for God manifested?
- ✚ How zealous am I in the way I worship?

Activities for this week

For Individuals

This week seek forgiveness from someone with whom you have been angry even if you already apologized to that person, seek forgiveness again.

For Families

We all seek to maintain good physical and spiritual health. Our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit. As a family this week plan and cook healthy meals to nurture your physical bodies and spend time praying together to nurture your spiritual bodies.

For Parish Groups

Have volunteers at the parish help with spring cleaning in and around the parish's physical plant. One group could wash windows. Another could dust the furniture etc.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord, help us to be zealous in our love for you.

All: By loving one another as you loved us

Leader: Lord, help us to be zealous in the care of our bodies.

All: By eating healthy foods and regular exercise.

Leader: Lord, help us to be zealous in developing our faith and in practicing it.

All: By observing our Lenten practices of fasting, praying and almsgiving.

All: Amen

Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.