



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

March 8, 2015

Third Sunday of Lent

Gospel reading John 2:13-25 *[To be read aloud]*

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the moneychangers seated there. 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 moneychangers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, *Zeal for your house will consume me.* At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 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. 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. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

Brief commentary:

As we begin the third week of Lent, the readings today call us to reflect on the "law of the LORD" in our lives and the call to a zealous fidelity toward God. The first reading, from the book of Exodus, presents the cornerstone of God's law, the commandments. Yet, far from being a set of restrictions or lofty ideals, the introduction to their listing is none other than the memory of God's personal loving care for the people: "I am the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery." First and foremost the commandments are presented as integral to the people's relationship with God. To this day Jews understand the commandments not as a set of cold legalistic rules and ordinances, but as the path set forth by God to live in his presence, to be more authentically human, and to be a light to the nations. The psalmist knows these laws, and rejoices as Jews rejoice today in them, valuing them above all goods: "your laws are more precious than gold...sweeter than honey!" Moreover, the memory of God's deliverance of the people sets the commandments as guarantors of the people's freedom today and into the future. Indeed, unless freedom is based on the truth about us and about our world, then it becomes a false freedom that ends up destroying itself and becoming destructive. The idea of freedom as 'the power to do whatever I want' can also be a perfect description of selfishness. How often we think we love ourselves by being selfish, but it is in fact a selfish love and not the true love with which God loves us! In our journey of self-denial this Lent – our 'no' to ourselves, so that we can be freer to say 'yes' to love God, our neighbor, and ourselves, more authentically – we realize that we are called by God, who is the champion of our true liberty, to be free to believe, to hope, to love. Saying 'yes' to myself always is not necessarily a sign that I am free: however, to be able to say 'no' to myself so that I can respond to God more, care more for my neighbor, and love myself more sincerely, is a sign that I am free. Today's gospel reading also calls us to honestly know our own human nature, to allow Christ to cleanse and transform us, and to live with zeal for God rather than for money, power, fame, and pleasure. It also calls us to cleanse our world from the evils that seek to destroy innocents whether through terrorism, poverty, oppression, abortion, and the like. Christians and all people of good will are called to make the temple of the world a place more worthy of the dignity of the human person: "Father...thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" Unlike in the Synoptic gospels, where the cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem by Jesus is the immediate precursor to his arrest and subsequent execution, in John's gospel the story appears toward the beginning of his ministry. The idea is that Jesus – who comes from God the Father – comes into the Temple of the LORD (his Father's House) to set things right in the hearts of people, to call all to authenticity before God in the way we worship, believe, think, value, treat each other, and live. Jesus Christ is the true Temple in whom "the fullness of God dwells" and, dwelling in us by his Spirit, makes us into a living Temple. Having considered all of this, however, it is Paul's first letter to the Corinthians today that can call us to reflect even more deeply and rejoice more heartedly: In Jesus, God has loved us in a way that far surpasses the giving of the law or the gift of wisdom; in Christ crucified God has loved us personally. This personal love of God for us reaches its depth and height and breadth in Christ crucified, in whom God lovingly gives himself to us to 'save us in every way that the human person can be saved', holding nothing back.

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- The journey of Lent involves a re-commitment to living according to the will and commandments of God. By doing so we journey from slavery toward freedom.
- The zeal of Jesus for the Temple and his cleansing of the Temple became an occasion to foretell his death and resurrection, but also a call to all to cleanse the temple of their hearts where God seeks to dwell.
- Christians live by the love God that has been poured out to us without limits in Christ crucified. At the same time, we must be agents of that true saving, redeeming, life-giving love.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- How can I recommit myself to keeping the Law of the Lord? What do I need to say 'no' to, and what do I need to say 'yes' to?
- What I am zealous for? How do I cleanse the temple of my heart so that I can give to God the gift of myself more completely?
- How have I experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ? How am I an agent of God's love in the world? How will I be a sign of God's love?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 2052-74, 1730-42