

Fr Ron Serrao ~ Homily; Third Sunday of Lent, Year B

Today is the Third Sunday of Lent. If we go back to the readings, especially the gospels, of the past two Sundays of Lent, I can say that they are interconnected. On the First Sunday, after His Baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the desert. He stayed there for forty days and forty nights in prayer, fasting and was tempted by the devil. But God came to His rescue through His angels. I call this as Jesus' desert experience with God. On the Second Sunday, Jesus brought His three disciples on the top of the mountain and Jesus there changed in appearance while praying. I call this as the mountaintop experience of Jesus in His encounter with God. Today's gospel is the cleansing of the temple by Jesus. The temple is a place of special encounter with God. But today we are not going to see the glorious face of Jesus; we are going to see His angry face. Jesus is not happy with what He sees precisely because the way the temple worship has been organized no longer reflects God's original idea of a worshipping community. He found people selling animals and exchanging money in His Father's house. Making a whip, Jesus drives the animals out and overturns the table of the money changers. Jesus loses His cool. Jesus losing His cool is something that is unthinkable. It could not have happened because we know Jesus as meek, humble, merciful, compassionate, kind and loving. For us to lose His cool is simply out of His character.

But Jesus gets angry of what they do and says to them: "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade,".

What is His reason in saying these words? His reason can be: His compassion for the poor people who are being exploited by them; irreverence of the temple worship and abuses tolerated by the religious authorities.

The readings also remind us to go back to the three basic principles of Christian life and I call these three principles as the Three Rs of Christian life.

The first R or principle is Relationship. Christianity is not just a religion but also a relationship. The essence of the ethics of Jesus is not only a law but a relationship of person to God. We pray, we worship, we attend Mass and we read the Bible because we want to deepen this kind of relationship with Him.

We deepen not only our relationship with Him but also our relationship with the other people. The second R or principle is Reliance. Reliance or dependence on God is more basic to our fulfillment than dependence on material things. No doubt, money is the sixth sense which enables us to enjoy the other five. But the picture of the merchants being driven out by Jesus from the Temple warns us of preoccupation with money. Money can buy food but not appetite; money can buy medicine but not health; money can buy a house but not a home; money can buy companions but not friends; money can buy everything but not eternal happiness.

I know of a person who had everything in life: money, wealth, food, houses, cars, beautiful wife and so on. He works eighteen hours a day just to acquire more money but at the end he committed suicide. And so let us rely on God because without Him we can do nothing.

The third R or principle is Renewal. Religion is in the heart and not only in the knees. It is because no matter how long our prayers are with our knees on the floor of the church but if we do not change our hearts for the better, nothing will happen and nothing will change.

These are the three basic principles of Christian life: Relationship, Reliance and Renewal.

The scripture today tells us about the cleansing of the temple, of corruption and possible even vice, greed, and who knows what else. What about our own cleansing? Our cleansing of sin in our own spiritual life, our environment, the entire global community.

With so many problems, cracking one's whip cannot be enough. The first step to take is to focus on self. How about a good confession [the sacrament of Reconciliation] sometime during Lent. It still is not too late. Travel with Jesus on the road to Calvary. and then on to the Resurrection.

This Lenten season, let us remember that we are called to be true witnesses of the Kingdom of God. All of us are disciples who should be willing to be illumined by the radiance of the light of Christ so that like Him, we too, will joyfully share in the new life with the Father. Amen.