

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

March 7, 2021 B

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Blessed are you, God of the Covenant. You formed Israel as your covenant people. You invite us into a new covenant of love in your Son. Help us to live always in accord with your will. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Response to last week's Word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads focus statement.** Our first reading tells about the covenant God made with Israel by giving them the Ten Commandments to live by. In the Gospel, Jesus reacts with anger to abuses in the Temple which he sees as violating the covenant. In our second reading, Paul calls us to embrace divine wisdom though the world may see it as foolishness.

*Let us listen to God's word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

### FIRST READING: Exodus 20:1-17

This is one of two versions of the Ten Commandments found in the Old Testament. (The other version can be found in Dt 5:6-21.) On Mount Sinai, God enters into a holy covenant relationship with the people of Israel whom he has just delivered from the slavery of Egypt (Ex 19). Briefly, the covenant relationship states: *"God (alone) will be Israel's God. He will travel with them offering protection and guidance. In response, Israel will follow God's ways."* To help the people of Israel understand more concretely what God expects of them, he gives them the Decalogue ("Ten Words"), better known as the "Ten Commandments." The first three commandments have to do with Israel's relationship with God, and the other seven with the people's relationship with each other.

In the *First Commandment*, God calls Israel to worship God *alone* and forbids them to carve any images of him. Israel's neighbors have many gods and have carved images of them. God is greater than any human attempt to capture him in an icon or statue. God knows that it is easy to move from the *veneration* of an image (what Catholics do) to *worship* of it (what pagans do).

*"I am a jealous God."* God's "jealousy" is like the protective care a parent has for the welfare of his/her child. It also means that God must be first in our lives, which does not mean that we cannot have a

wholehearted love for family and friends. In fact, putting God first in our lives should help us to have a wholehearted love for all of God's people. That being the case, if we sincerely abide by the *First Commandment*, following the other nine will be much easier. On the other hand, if we ignore the *First Commandment*, we will all too easily fail when it comes to following the other nine.

The *Second Commandment* calls on Israel to honor God's name. In fact they so revere God's name that they avoid using it. In prayer, they use another name for God – *Adonai*, i.e., Lord. Especially forbidden is the use of God's name for purposes of perjury, magic and curses.

The *Third Commandment* calls on Israel to set aside one day a week for worship of God. This commandment also ensures that workers, especially slaves, have some time off.

The *Fourth* through the *Tenth Commandments* are intended to safeguard, protect, and uphold those values upon which a holy and wholesome society is built, e.g., family ties and parental respect (*Fourth*); reverence for life (*Fifth*); marriage and fidelity (*Sixth*); rights of proprietorship (*Seventh*); honesty and sincerity (*Eighth*); and house work (*Ninth* and *Tenth*).

## RESPONSORIAL PSALM 19

The faithful Israelite sees God's law as a guide and not as a hindrance to true freedom. "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul" (v. 8).

## SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 1:22-25

Commenting on this reading, Fr. Lawrence Mick writes:

*This brief passage confronts us with a basic decision each of us must make. Will we live by the wisdom of the world or by the foolishness of god? So much of our faith life defies conventional wisdom. Our society certainly doesn't teach us to serve others, to fight for justice for the oppressed or to put love above money, just to mention a few values. The gospel teaches us a whole different way of viewing the world and of responding to life. If we try to live the gospel, many will consider us foolish. Are we willing to risk that?*

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 2:13-25

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

## GOSPEL: John 2:13-25

The Gospel for the next three Sundays will be from John. Many of John's stories have two levels of meaning which we will come back to later.

Commenting on this Sunday's Gospel, Fr. Flor McCarthy, SDB, writes:

*Jesus' action in cleansing the temple was a protest against the commercialization of religion and the desecration of the Temple. But it went deeper. It was a symbolic action, in the fashion of an Old Testament prophet (see Jer 7:11; Mal 3.1), through which he passed judgement on the Jewish sacrificial system. He was declaring that temple worship, with its ritual and animal sacrifices, was irrelevant and could do nothing to bring people to God. He was replacing sacrificial worship with spiritual worship.*

*He was also protesting at the way religion had become narrow, nationalistic, and exclusive. Israel*

*had failed to fulfil her universal mission to humankind. It was God's intention that the Temple should be a house of prayer 'for all nations.' But the Temple remained the jealously guarded preserve of Israel. No Gentile dared venture, under threat of penalty and death, beyond what was known as the 'court of the Gentiles.' Jesus declared that salvation was not just for the Jews, but for all peoples."*

Above, we said that many of John's stories have two levels of meaning, a *literal* meaning and a *deeper* meaning. The literal or historical meaning is about the Jewish temple which had been destroyed for many years when John was writing his Gospel. On a *deeper* level, John is referring to the temple of Jesus' body which will be resurrected and become the new focus of his followers' worship life.

## FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Name some ways you see people today violating the First Commandment. What helps you to deep God first in your life? What makes it difficult?
3. Can you give an example where living the Gospel can make you look foolish to others? If you have a personal example, what gave you the courage to be true to your beliefs?
4. How do you feel about people who show zeal for a particular cause? How is their behavior like or different from Jesus?
5. When it comes to worship of God, there is always the danger that our worship becomes ritualistic. We go through the motions of prayer. What can help us to stop that from happening?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

## JOURNALING

*Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

## **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

**Facilitator:** Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, you showed us our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, show me where I need to grow in respect for my body and help me to do so.*

## **RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD**

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Is there any of the Ten Commandments that you are neglecting? If so, pray for the grace of true conversion. What in your life competes for first place with God? Be sure it doesn't become a false idol.

## **CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

**Facilitator:** What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray especially for the purification of our Church and for ourselves. Pray for the grace and skill to express our anger in a constructive way. Pray for the Elect preparing for Baptism and entrance into our Church this Easter. Pray that God give you opportunities to share your talk. Talk about religion with people whom you would not normally do this with.

## **CLOSING PRAYER (Together)**

*Lord Jesus, you cleansed the Temple  
so that it would be dedicated to worship.  
Cleanse our hearts that we might be dedicated to you.  
We ask this of you who live and reign  
with the Father and the Spirit forever.  
Amen.*