

**THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT:
CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE; MARCH 7th, 2021**

In order to understand Jesus' reaction on this particular day; We need to have a mental picture of the temple area during his time at the time of the Passover feast.

The activities at the Temple were the year's major event: religiously, culturally and economically for all of Israel, especially for Jerusalem. Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the world at Passover.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, says over 250,000 Passover victims - oxen, sheep and doves - were sacrificed during Passover. (**Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, Joachim Jeremias, pg. 57**).

The picture of something like our county fair today during summer with people packed together coming and going, moving along with thousands of oxen and sheep, or carrying doves in little birdcages. The high priestly family may have been in on this business big time.

Josephus described the High Priest Ananias as "the great procurer of money." (**ibidem, pg 49**) On top of all this there were the moneychangers.

The law required that people purchase their sacrifice with Jewish currency. Roman coins were considered idolatrous because they were engraved with pagan inscriptions and images. Since the Jews were under Roman occupation, they probably had to use Roman currency in their everyday lives. So when people came to Jerusalem and they wanted to buy an animal for sacrifice, they had to exchange their foreign money for Jewish currency. *Thus we have the moneychangers.*

Aside from any cheating or dishonesty, there were those who were getting quite wealthy in the name of God. Jesus told the Jewish leaders who challenged him for doing what he did: "you have made it (the Temple) a den of thieves." We sometimes wonder why Jesus reacted so violently in this instance. We see him nowhere else in the Scriptures expressing such anger. Quite possibly he was angry at seeing how poor people coming to worship God were being ripped off. The gospels give us another reason too for his anger as they recalled the psalm verse: "Zeal for your house will consume me." Obviously he placed worship of God much more highly than most people do. We all know how easy it is to become careless in our reverence and devotion to our Heavenly Father. Often God gets put in second place, or even further down in our list of priorities. It was not that way with Jesus. His Heavenly Father always took first place with him.

We heard the Commandments in our first reading. Notice they are not suggestions or recommendations. They are spoken by one who speaks with authority. Notice that our obligations to God are placed at the top of the list. Is that because God is in need of our worship? No, it's just putting things in perspective. If we value our relationship with God, everything else falls into place. When God is forgotten, then we have no anchor, no ground on which to base our morality, no one to whom we are accountable. We make up our own rules; we make ourselves into our own gods. That's where Adam and Eve got into trouble; they wanted to make themselves equal to God and make their own rules. That is how they lost the happiness God initially gave them.

The commandments and the cleansing of the Temple might prompt us today on this third Sunday of Lent to reflect on our own relationship with God. We call him Lord. Do our lives show that we believe what we say?