

3rd Sunday Lent (B)

- I don't know about you, but I often find myself asking people when I first come to meet them, where they live, & I do so for a number of reasons – to find out whether they are in our parish & therefore I would have responsibility for them, & if they are, I'm interested in whether I know their street & perhaps where in that street they live, or I ask to see whether I need to gain the permission of another parish priest to marry them or baptize their children & otherwise, generally I'm interested as to whether I know anything about the area in which they live, whether I have some connection to it.
- The idea of where one lives or dwells is perhaps the central theme of John's gospel. John begins his gospel by telling us that Jesus is the Word who became flesh & dwelt among us - *"In the beginning" the Word was dwelling with God, & the Word was God.*
- Immediately after his baptism in the Jordan, we hear the first words that Jesus speaks in the fourth gospel. He sees two disciples of John the Baptist following him & says to them, *"What are you looking for?"* They reply. *"Rabbi, where do you dwell?"* Jesus replies, *"Come, & see."*
- John's gospel is a gospel of incarnation - its essence is sacramental or symbolic: the extraordinary is actualized, made manifest in the ordinary.
- The eternal Word becomes present & is revealed by living among us.
- So, the disciples' question about where Jesus lives isn't just about a street address somewhere in Galilee.
- When Jesus replies "Come, & see," he also means seeing with the eyes of faith - And when he speaks to his disciples, he is also speaking to us.
- The astonishing good news that Jesus reveals is that anyone who believes in him will live where he lives, with the Father.
- John's gospel is the story of the signs that Jesus does, so that those whom he encountered then, & those who hear the gospel now, might believe & have life in him by finding where he lives & by coming to know him.
- John presents various types of people who refuse to see the "extraordinary" through the signs, & also the disciples who do see & come to believe in Jesus.
- Today's gospel is a prophetic warning so that we will not be like the temple authorities that do not see that Jesus is the one sent by God to dwell among us in new ways, & while their minds are closed, they can't possibly know him.
- Jesus' action in the temple is in line with the tradition of the prophets who saw through the hypocrisy of people.
- The temple truly was the dwelling place of the divine presence: the holy place of prayer & of being with God.
- The Temple in Jerusalem was (& still is) a powerful symbol of holiness & a symbol of the connection & relationship between God & the Hebrew people.
- It is often assumed that Jesus' anger was directed at the traders & moneychangers because their business had infringed on & desecrated the temple precinct, but the reality is a bit more complicated.

- The Temple was the holiest site for sacrifice to God; the tradition dictated that sacrifice made by a priest on the altar was the highest form of worship.
- The best animal to sacrifice was a healthy, properly formed creature.
- Rather than walking a lamb all the way from somewhere like Galilee to Jerusalem, the people would purchase their sacrifice animal at the Temple itself – thus the presence of the people selling cattle, sheep & doves.
- However, to further complicate matters, the Temple traders would not accept Roman coins to purchase the sacrificial animals as they bore the image of the deified emperor.
- Therefore, money changers were required to exchange Roman currency for acceptable coinage – so the money changers were also playing their part in the prayer life of the Temple, & they profited through the exchange.
- Jesus' outrage is not so much with the traders & the money-changers as with the whole religious practice & hierarchical structure that has developed to a point where the only way a person can pray in a 'valid' way is to purchase an animal & hand it over to a priest who goes behind a screened wall to sacrifice the animal - The only way to seek God's forgiveness & mercy was to 'buy' it at the Temple. This was what outraged Jesus; he could not stomach the injustice nor the barriers that had been erected between the people & their God.
- John declares Jesus as the new Temple where God dwells – it changes everything for those who see the new Temple in Jesus, in whom God lives.
- It is not enough to enter a church to meet God; you need to be with Jesus, where he dwells, to join his project, to follow his footsteps, to live by his spirit - & the doors of this new temple, which is Jesus, are open to all – no one is excluded – sinners, the unclean & even pagans can enter it.
- The God who lives in Jesus belongs to all & is for all.
- There is no discrimination whatsoever in this temple – there is no separate space for men & women; there are no chosen races or excluded nations.
- The only favorites are those in need of love & life.
- We can reduce the meaning of the Christian sacraments to suit our own purposes, & so close our eyes to other signs of God's presence to which the sacraments point.
- For Catholics the greatest sacrament of Jesus Christ's presence is the Eucharist.
- It is possible to believe in this sacramental divine presence & at the same time to ignore what Jesus has spoken to us of his presence in the least of his brothers & sisters.
- It might be a good reminder that the criterion of the way we will be judged, according to what Jesus tells us about, is not whether we recognize his presence in the Eucharist, but whether we respond with compassion to his presence in the least of his brothers & sisters.
- The Eucharist should open our eyes to see the presence of the living God in people - & to know God through the beauty of those who deserve our love.