**Readings for March 3, 2024 – Third Sunday of Lent**

Fastened to Boldness in Our Faith

*Only the power of God could build a new and permanent temple – the risen Body of Christ. We proclaim Christ crucified because in the seeming foolishness of his death, we know the wisdom and strength of the God of life.*

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**Opening Prayer:** Most gracious God, we come together today, seeking to grow closer in friendship with you. Increase our understanding and wisdom, so that we may always desire to live out your commandments, especially your call for us to love others. Amen.

Reading I [**Ex 20:1-17**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/exodus/20?1)

In those days, God delivered all these commandments: “I, the LORD, am your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.
You shall not have other gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves
in the shape of anything in the sky above
or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth;
you shall not bow down before them or worship them.
For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God,
inflicting punishment for their fathers’ wickedness
on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation;
but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation
on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments. “You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain.
For the LORD will not leave unpunished the one who takes his name in vain. “Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work,
but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God.
No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter,
or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you.
In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth,
the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested.
That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. “Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land
which the LORD, your God, is giving you.
You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him.”

Responsorial Psalm [**19:8, 9, 10, 11**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/19?8)

**R. (John 6:68c)  Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.**The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul;
The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,  giving wisdom to the simple.
**R. Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.**The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye.
**R. Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.**The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true, all of them just.
**R. Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.**They are more precious than gold, than a heap of purest gold;
sweeter also than syrup or honey from the comb.
**R. Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.**

Reading II [**1 Cor 1:22-25**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1corinthians/1?22)

Brothers and sisters: Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,
but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom,
and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Gospel [**Jn 2:13-25**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/john/2)

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 money changers 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 money changers 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.

Related Reflections

Today’s Gospel gives us a shocking picture of Jesus. Our gentle savior has turned violent. He erupts as he sees merchants vend oxen, sheep and doves in the temple, sees money-changers doing base commerce in God’s house.

Not only is this unlike the Jesus we know, but doesn’t it violate the holy temple? These trades-people were selling animals because living creatures were needed for burnt offerings. People had to buy them somewhere. And they had to get their money changed, since so many of them came from lands with different currencies. Sounds reasonable doesn’t it?

Not to Jesus. He yells, “you are desecrating my Father’s temple!” He grabs some dividing cords, yanking them into a knot, and whips the vendors. Whips them! Quite a terrible sight. He heaves the carefully sorted coins into an unholy mess on the floor and finishes up by hurtling the tables into this chaos.

How in the world does such fury coincide with the quiet, humble Jesus we will see in Holy Week? There he will barely say a word, even though his enemies will be violating the Father’s holiest temple of all, Jesus’ very self.

What is going on here? Some external reasons for his vehemence are evident. Vendors were allowed only in the courtyard of the temple, not inside where they now had established themselves. And perhaps the dishonest practices of outdoor market-places had stolen their way into the temple. The thumb on the scale, the inflated prices, all of that.

There is another, internal reason which is much more important. Jesus knew with blessed certainty what human beings were created to be. We are made to be filled with God’s presence, to be beloved by God personally and to love God in return. We are most ourselves when we are not entrapped by riches, honor and pride. We are designed to “let go and let God.” Jesus must have been overwhelmed when he saw merchants winking at these Godly values, preferring cold cash and cheating in the center of sacred space. Everything was upside down.

Why did he react so very differently during Holy Week? Why was he silent then? Because by then Jesus had come to understand the depths of his mission: not just to do social action—that’s what the temple scene was—not just to cure the people miraculously, not to preach from the hillsides. He saw that he must become one with our death as well as our life, must unite with us in the terrible hurts we get from each other. Only then could he show how very close God is.

Wrath for sure can be an understandable and just reaction to selfishness and greed. The merchants were seeking short-term profit at the expense of freedom, holiness, truth, and completion of the human spirit. Worse, they were foisting all this upon the people Jesus had come to save.

No wonder he hurled himself against these blind money grubbers. His emotion was real and quite impressive. But by contrast, on the cross he would empty himself out. He would surrender everything, including his fury, a surrender that would cancel out the grubbing of the money changers.

John Foley, SJ – published on https://liturgy.slu.edu/

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**From Bishop Robert Barron – www.wordonfire.org**

"The Temple in Jerusalem was everything for ancient Jews. The Temple was the religious center of the nation, as well as the political and cultural capital. To get some idea of its importance, we would have to think of the Vatican, the United Nations, and the Sorbonne. For the Biblical Jews, the Temple was more than a religious meeting place; it was God’s house, the place where God made his dwelling on earth, the tabernacle of Yahweh.

So what did it mean for a provincial prophet to come into the holy city of Jerusalem and make a ruckus in the Temple? Well, you can surely imagine. So what was he doing and why? First, in showing his lordship over even this most sacred symbol, he was announcing who he was—God. Second, he was instituting a new Temple—the temple of his own body. The authentic dwelling place of God, the sanctuary that replaces the corrupt sanctuaries of religion is the temple of his crucified and risen body. Jesus himself is the place where God dwells, and we, in the measure that we are grafted on to him, are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Today the Church is the sacred Temple of Christ’s body. It is most itself when it gathers to pray as his body and around his body and blood. Does this mean that the Church, in its institutional dimension, is beyond criticism? Obviously not. Sometimes we need the Lord to come into the Temple and clean it out. Does it mean that, individually, we are clean and pure? No, and this Lent we might invite Jesus in for a little spring-cleaning. What in our “Temple” needs to be purified? How have we allowed the moneychangers to invade the sacred space? What would arouse the anger of Jesus if he toured around inside our house?"

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Those thieves who had infested the temple were deceiving the people. They conned them out of their coin, yes, but more tragically, they conned them out of an authentic relationship with God. These temple thieves told the masses that God’s love must be bought, must be fought for, must be earned, must be defended. Jesus, of course, is the physical manifestation of God’s love freely given. And in Matthew’s telling, immediately after cleansing the temple, “the blind and the lame approached [Jesus] in the temple area, and he cured them.” [(Mt 21:14)](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/21) - Eric Clayton, Jesuits.org

**Getting our attention:**

Recently, an email popped up from somebody, and that person thanked me for the reflection for the Sunday before Lent. This person wrote that she/he never liked Lent, and does not now. Then I read, “Does anyone?” Just exactly what I needed to begin today’s Reflection.

Compose in your imagination the whole people of Israel who, three months previously were freed from the slavery in Egypt, standing at the base of Mount Sinai. Moses has informed the people that God would be speaking to them very soon. Accompanied by thunder, lightning and trumpet blasts, a dense and dark cloud appears. Does “anyone” like that?

Then the news everyone has been waiting to hear comes forth from the cloud. The news is comprised of ten commands which God wants carried out or else! “Does anyone like that?”

This then, is the context for our first reading. The whole historical relationship between God and Israel is summed up with God’s reminding the people who God is in their history, namely, the one who brought them out of the land and state of slavery. These ten laws are forms of living gratefully as the people who were saved. They are ways of respecting God’s presence in all of life’s relationships. They can be heard as “have-to” and “shouldn’t-do.” Does “anyone” like listening to that?

These commands cover most of our fallen-nature’s tendencies. Way down deep, they are all about reverencing the Truth of God in everything. Stealing is a sin, because I don’t like the truth that I don’t have what you do. Killing is wrong, because I do not reverence your life as a presence of God’s life. Coveting, and false speech are also about not reverencing God’s truth. In brief, everything is holy, and the Sabbath is the day to catch up, not on our work, but on all that God has worked in our lives. The question is about whether these are commands to frighten us into submission, or invitations to real orderly life. Doesn’t everyone like that?

I smile to think of how this Gospel will be heard in our parishes, perhaps followed by announcements about ticket-sales, books, religious articles, and other good things being sold out in the vestibule. **The more important thing is Jesus declaring that as holy as the temple is, his body is even more sacred and timeless.** This Gospel was written years after the Romans had destroyed the Jerusalem temple. It had been the locus of the presence of the Holy. The Jewish people were being presented with various options or sects proposing God’s election or selection. John’s Gospel proposes Jesus and during His days, because of his signs, many Jews came to believe in him as the Holy One. This sign took place in Jerusalem during the Passover, not an insignificant fact. In due time he will be the Lamb, sacrificed during the Passover. For the Jews, this is very hard to hear and believe. How could the Holy Temple of God be replaced by a single human man come down from Galilee?

What is there to like about Lent? The Ten Commandments are not so much things to like, because they tell us what to do and not to do. They give us a way to know how we are doing religiously. Usually, we are not doing as well as we would like, so that’s something not to like.

What’s there to like about Lent? It’s the time for letting God get our attention and if God gets our attention we will hear of the holiness of God, of all life and especially of ourselves. Doesn’t everyone like that kind of Lent? *How happy are they who dwell in your house! Forever they are praising you!* (Psalm 88:5)

 Larry Gillick, SJ - published on https://liturgy.slu.edu/

Discussion Questions

Why do you think the Ten Commandments have survived all the way from the time of Moses? Is there more in each one than we ordinarily see? Look at Fr. Larry Gillick’s reflection and talk about how the basis of the commandments is about reverencing the Truth of God. For instance, could respect of life be extrapolated from “Thou shalt not kill”? Discuss the others he mentions.

Have I experienced a time of lukewarm faith? What got my attention, or reawakened my zeal for God? What can we do to awaken ourselves from “business as usual,” to a more lively, and bolder faith?

Can you believe that God loves you for who you are and not because of anything you have done? Why do you say this? (See Eric Clayton’s reflection)

What is your initial reaction to this display of Jesus’ anger and his action in the Temple? What do you think of the contrast Fr. Foley shows in the way Jesus’ surrendered at his crucifixion?

**Closing Prayer**

Today, I pause a minute and give thanks for insights gained here, and for desires awakened. (Pause)

Lord Jesus, teach us what we should value most. Do not spare us the flame of your indignation at lukewarm faith, or the fire of your anger at compromises with injustice. Lord, send us the blaze of your purifying love. Awaken in us a passionate love for God and neighbor. Inspire us to boldness as we encounter our own trials of faith. Empower us with zeal for your Church, holy and sinful, yet truly the place where the Spirit dwells, and the Body of Christ can build a better world together.

Strengthen us as we strengthen one another in faith, hope and love. Amen.

*“Oh Lord, I pray, fasten my soul to you.”*

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Something to pray with this week

Jesus’ actions often seemed radical, even leading his family to think he was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:20-21). Clearly Jesus was forging a new path, preferring to associate with those who were sick and lame, and even going so far as to expel demons, and associating with known sinners, the outcasts of society. Sometimes, Jesus’ radical approach to people and situations was just too much for them to comprehend.

In the quiet of my heart, can I ponder if Jesus is sometimes “too much” for me? I live by the commandments (pretty much) and I try to live as Jesus invites me to, but am I willing to move beyond the comfort zone of my daily routine to really give my heart to Jesus?

Do I ever feel overwhelmed by what being a follower of Christ demands? Or maybe I feel that I’m so far away from this kind of perfection that I just don’t think about it all?

Jesus was even willing to give his life for others. How am I willing to give some of my own time and energy and life today? As Bishop Barron suggests in his reflection, “what in my own temple needs some purification?” Adapted from *—The Jesuit Prayer team – Ignatianprayer.org*