

### Third Sunday of Lent B - Jesus brings us in His Person Cleansing from Sin, True Light, and New Life

March 3, 2024

The rite of Scrutiny is observed on the Third, fourth and fifth Sunday of Lent, the texts and readings are from Mass-Cycle A. The Johannine Gospels for these three middle Sundays in Lent for Year B pursue the same themes as those of Year A. For our parishes preparing for the 1st scrutiny of Christian initiation, we have John's gospel recording Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4, 5-42). For parishes not having the Christian initiation, we have Jesus cleansing the temple (John 2, 13-25). In both readings, Jesus mentioned that true worship will not be tied to some particular sanctuary; it will be worship 'in spirit and truth' (4:24). In John's chapter 2, Jesus promises a 'sign' to confirm his prophetic gesture: 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up'. After the resurrection, his disciples recognized that 'he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body'. The first reading from Exodus (20:1-17), proclaiming the commandments which were an essential part of the covenant God made with his people in the desert, matches the gospel in today's liturgy, because it calls us to a worship that is authentic – through the renunciation of the false securities we are tempted to put in the place of God. With Jesus leading us, we look towards what lies at the end of our journey. The reading from the letter to the Corinthians points to the Cross, the astounding inauguration of the new order of things which will take place at the end of the Saviour's journey to the Holy City. In this new order of things, we can all worship the Father 'in spirit and in truth': through the Paschal Mystery – our sharing in the life and worship of the Risen Lord. We are able to share in his gift of himself to the Father, as he becomes for us 'the power and the wisdom of God'. In the drama of the Cross, 'God's foolishness' is proved to be 'wiser than human wisdom'; and 'God's weakness' is shown to be 'stronger than human strength'.

I think all of us at some point in our lives have someone—maybe our parents, a teacher, a certain group—someone we wanted so much to just love us as we were no matter how good or how bad we became or still are. But sometimes we say to ourselves, 'I'm not smart enough, good enough, or beautiful enough'. Or perhaps we think 'I'm not popular enough, couldn't be a leader; not holy enough, couldn't help with anything at Mass; not intelligent enough, couldn't go to grad school'. Because of this low self-esteem, we pretend to be someone we aren't. Maybe if I drank more, people will like me; maybe if I made enough money, I'll be happy; maybe if I sleep around enough, I won't be alone. Sometimes our world tells us: 'You're too Black, too White, too conservative, too liberal, too old, too young, too different, you're not holy enough, you're divorced, you're gay, you got pregnant, you messed up. Whatever you are, you are JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH'. Today, **Christ says, 'ENOUGH!'** Enough of all these nonsense. We have work to do, and we can't do it if we're divided. In the Gospel, Jesus doesn't care about barriers, or rules, or laws if they are meant to separate us. He doesn't care about tradition if it's meant to put other people down. In today's story, all Jesus cared about was the Samaritan woman and her people. In those few moments, he showed her by his words and his actions that no matter what she thought, no matter what society thought, and no matter what the law thought, in his eyes she was enough. The Samaritan woman (and all of us) is a person Christ loves. He loves her (and us) enough to show her (and us) the way to a new life, the way to salvation!

We aren't perfect, yet Christ loves us. We are human and he is God, yet Christ becomes intimately one with us. Our world might tell us we aren't good enough, yet Christ comforts us in this meal with his love saying, 'The Body of Christ—you are good; The Blood of Christ—you are enough'. If we believe that, if we say Amen to that, we must then treat all people as Christ treats us—as enough, as worthy, as children of the same Father. There's too much work to do—the harvest is ready. There are so many people thirsting to be known and loved for who they are. Every week God gives us that extravagant love, despite all our weaknesses and barriers. If we want our worship here to be authentic, to be worship in Spirit and Truth, then we must go out and tell others about this love, this gift of God. In a concrete way the Church has a chance to show that love.

For when God wants to know us, it will be completely, without boundaries, without rejection, without requiring us to be someone we are not. All that is asked is that we believe and have faith. When we first came to the church, it was because of a word someone had told us, because of a story from a modern-day Samaritan who spoke of one who knew everything she or he had done. Since that day, we've been gathering with church family, hearing God's word with us. We pray that we will no longer believe because of other people's word but because we have heard for ourselves, and have come to know that we are good enough, that God is more than enough, and that Jesus is truly the savior of the world. Jesus cleanses us from our sins. He is our true light and gives us new life. We learn each Sunday of God's compassionate love, but in this cycle there is an emphasis upon the cross, upon how costly the grace of following Christ can be. Only the cross will lead us to resurrection with him. It is so easy to make compromises in our lives, to slowly abandon our ideals as we make accommodations to what seems "sensible." The money changers know people need animals to offer in the Temple sacrifices and so they set up a market along the side of the building. Everybody wins, right? Yet Jesus demands "zeal," a wholehearted dedication to God's call. For in his own person, indeed, in his own body he is the new and living dwelling-place of God among humanity—and so are we! What truly needed is a spring housecleaning before Easter in our Temple!

For parishes observing the Scrutiny, it is a good moment for the Elect, the candidates, to stand before the congregation and dare to reveal their own barriers. The Word of God has scrutinized them, and they will look into their hearts for their deepest longings. They will turn to us, the Church, for encouragement, prayer, and support. Friends, candidates, no matter what the world has told you, no matter what your own fears have told you, here, you are enough. We believe that about you not because of any deeds you have done, not because you've passed any tests or proven yourselves. We believe you are enough because of our faith in Christ and because of our hope in the glory of God. And that hope will not disappoint. We believe that the God who brought the Israelites out of their slavery will also bring you out of the slavery of jealousy, pride, and being too busy. We believe that the God who brought flowing water out of the rock will also pour his love into your hearts so that they may not become hardened by isolation, laziness, distrust, and selfishness. We believe that the God who revealed his true identity to an outcast will also reveal to you the truth about what's really important and what really makes us holy in God's eyes. We believe this because of our baptism, because God is stronger than our sin. We know this because of the Holy Spirit, because God always gives us more than we expect. We know this because of the Eucharist, the bread we eat and the wine we drink Sunday after Sunday, because God makes even our imperfect lives into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, every Lord's day should be like a step on the way up to heaven but is it? God wants us to worship him with more than words and external behaviour. Worship means saying to God: 'How great thou art.' It's our response and gratitude when we recognize the goodness of God in our lives. Worship and the way we live are not meant to be cut off from one another. As well as going to church on Sunday, we are called to be the church in our society during the week. We are called to have a close relationship with our God. Mother Teresa in her Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech (1979) said, 'We have been created to love and be loved, and God has become man to make it possible for us to love as he loved us. He makes himself the hungry one, the naked one, the homeless one, the sick one, the one in prison, the lonely one, the unwanted one...He is hungry for our love' Maybe together with the elect we should all ask ourselves: 'What do I want Jesus to drive out from me and my life? How have I betrayed my relationship with Jesus by letting other "gods" into my heart and my life? What stumbling blocks in me or in society that keep God's power from working through me? What keeps me from hearing the voice of the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized - **the voice of God?**'