

Commentary to the Third Sunday of Lent (B)

The Wisdom of the Cross



This Sunday's gospel put Jesus' knowledge of our human nature so clearly: He really knew what was going on in men's hearts. He knew what they thought. He saw what they did to the Temple. The Temple was a place of worship. It was a place of celebrating the spiritual presence of God in the world. And they transformed it. They changed the Temple into a marketplace. They utilized a system of money changing that robbed the poor people, forcing them to spend extra money for the prescribed practices. He knew men's hearts. He knows our hearts. He knew that our celebration of his birth at Christmas would be transformed from a day to celebrate the Spiritual Becoming One with Us to a celebration of materialism.

He knew that we would hide the celebration of the Resurrection behind the Easter Bunny. He even knew that some people would begin their Easter celebrations two days early and have a party on Good Friday (That, to me, is the height of paganism.) He knew that people would see the signs that he worked, the miracles he performed, but would refuse to see the messages behind the signs and the miracles. Instead they would see him as a wonder worker, a super man, a good show. He knew that they would not recognize whom he really was. Nor were they ready to listen to his message.

Those who followed the way of the world could never accept sacrificial love, a death on a cross, as the way to salvation. He would show us what real love was. He would die on a cross for us. For God had entrusted creation to man from the very beginning. He would not take this gift back. If mankind had broken the relationship with God, then mankind would have to make the decision to once more seek

this relationship. One who is a man would have to restore the relationship. The man, the Son of God become flesh, would give himself up completely for the sake of others.

His death would make God's life real to the world. The cross did not make sense to the Jews who wanted signs, wonders, a superman, a triumphant messiah. The cross didn't make sense to the Gentiles whose philosophers and sophists could not understand the wisdom of Christ's sacrifice. But, as St. Paul writes, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews, an absurdity to the Gentiles, but to all those who are called, Jews and Gentiles alike, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For God's folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men." The particular temple that Jesus entered was the third temple, the glorious Temple. The Temple of Solomon had been destroyed during the Babylonian Captivity in the 6th century BC. The temple that replaced it after the captivity was nowhere near as glorious as Solomon's. When the Temple of Herod was constructed at the beginning of Jesus' life it was a wonder of the world.

Remember Jesus gazing on the temple as the disciples looked at it with their mouths open. But no matter how powerful, how strong the new temple looked, it was insignificant. It could be and it would be destroyed. The Romans would tear it apart in the year 70 AD to such an extent that the only portion left then, and still existing now, is the Wailing Wall. But Christ's presence would never be removed from the world. His love is eternal.

He is always here with us. During Lent we celebrate our ability to live Christ's life. We are called upon to consider how well we are following Christ's way, the way of sacrificial love. Our houses may be destroyed in a natural disaster, but nothing can remove the love of Christ from our homes, wherever we may be. The one thing that will last forever is the sacrificial love of the Lord we have been enjoined to perpetuate in the world.

We must be willing to sacrifice ourselves for others, our families and our friends. We must be willing to demonstrate with our own lives that Jesus' wisdom and strength, the wisdom and strength of the cross, proves the lie of the materialistic mind set of the world. The wisdom of the cross reveals all else to be folly and weakness.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ