

REVERENCE FOR GOD: 3rd SUNDAY OF LENT B

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We heard it said of Jesus in the gospel: *'Zeal for your house will devour me.'* A Jesuit priest in England, Paul O'Reilly, has told a story against himself about zeal and reverence for the house of God. When he was still a deacon, Paul was put in charge of the altar servers. He was a flop in the job. So they took it away from him and gave it to a zealous layman called Adrian.

Now Adrian is one of those people who are naturally good with young people. He's outgoing, cheerful, down-to-earth and easy to get along with. He liked the altar servers and they liked and respected him. Within a few weeks of his taking over, the number of servers had doubled, and they started turning up on time for practices. Most importantly their work on the altar was much improved. Everybody, including Paul, was very pleased that Adrian had taken over the job and was making such a big success of it.

Then one day Paul happened to be in the church when Adrian caught two of the altar servers chewing gum in church. He went absolutely berserk. He shouted, he screamed, he yelled at them for what must have been ten minutes. And all through that time he kept saying one thing over and over again: *'You are altar servers. You are here to reverence God in the church. You do not chew gum in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.'*

Paul thought this ticking off would be the end. Surely after that the altar servers would rebel. There would be deputations to the parish priest, and one big hullabaloo. And worst of all Paul was afraid that the job of training them would come back to him.

In fact, none of those things happened. By the very next day it became clear that the servers respected and followed Adrian more than ever. It

made Paul stop and think. He reached this conclusion: What the altar servers respected in their leader was that he was angry for the right reasons. He was not angry because they had done anything personal against him. He was angry for the Lord, for the reverence that is due to God's house. Zeal for God's house had devoured him.

The whole point of being an altar server is to bring prayerful reverence to the Mass, the reverence that is due to the greatness and goodness of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Mass is the way we Catholics fulfil the first three of the Ten Commandments which were presented in our First Reading tonight:

You will have no gods but me.

You will do nothing to dishonour my holy name.

You will keep holy the day of rest, my special day.

The reason we come to Mass every Sunday is not just to hear a homily. It is not simply out of a sense of duty, custom, or tradition. It is not merely to have the pleasure of meeting our friends and fellow parishioners. It is not only to receive Christ our Saviour in Holy Communion. No, we come to Mass in the first place to give praise, honour and thanksgiving to God, from whom all blessings flow. And if we too have enough reverence, respect and love for God, then zeal for his house and for his interests will devour us too.

But please, Paul concludes his story, let's not take out our zeal for God and the reverence due to God on the altar servers. We need them as much as ever. Anyway they're doing the best they can!

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