

# The Holy Spirit Province

## NEWSLETTER

1st March 2021



### **PUTTING GOD FIRST: 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT B**

***How much time and space are we giving God every day?***

Cecil B. DeMille was a famous Hollywood director. After filming *The Ten Commandments*, he was asked, “Which commandment do you think people break the most today?” He replied, “The first one: ‘Worship no god but me ... Don’t bow down to any idol.’ It’s the one Israel broke first, and it’s the one that people still break the most.” He hastened to add that people don’t bow down to idols of metal and stone, but to those of fame, flesh, and money.

Put more positively, that first commandment has been expressed in the Bible, as “love the Lord your God with all your mind, heart, soul and strength”, and “love your neighbour as you love yourself”, i.e., with respect, kindness, and care. Jesus endorsed those three ways of loving. They sum up the meaning of life, which is to become and remain, a truly loving person.

The ten commandments of God have never been replaced or abolished. Nor should they! For they are a map of life for all who believe in God, and the laws of God for living life to the full - with meaning, purpose, integrity, commitment, and contentment.

Once a sincere Jewish man went to his rabbi to seek advice about living an authentic life. “How have you been going so far?”, the rabbi asked. “I don’t think I’ve broken any of the commandments”, came the reply. “But have you kept the commandments?” the rabbi responded. “I mean, have you honoured God’s holy name? Have you kept the sabbath day holy? How have you loved and supported your parents in their old age? How have you preserved, defended, and promoted life? When did you last show your wife how much you love her? Have you opened your heart to the lonely and the homeless? Have you shared your money with poor people? Have you defended someone being attacked? When did you last put yourself out to help a neighbour in need?” The rabbi was offering him a new vision – not merely to avoid evil, but to do good, and become the best person he could be.

In our gospel today, we see an angry Jesus with a whip in his hand. This image sort of clashes with the usual one of a gentle, smiling, kindly Jesus. It is so different that we might want to dismiss it as fake. It would be a mistake to do so, as It shows another side to the character and personality of Jesus. Of course, he was kind and gentle. But he wasn’t weak. When it was needed, he could be strong and assertive.

We may have been taught that all anger is sinful. In itself, though, anger is just a feeling, and neither morally good nor bad. Still, anger can be dangerous and lead us to say or do bad things we later regret. But when anger spurs us to put right something seriously wrong, it can be a good thing. A blatantly unjust situation should make us angry enough to act. In that case, it can be a loving and helpful response.

On this occasion, the anger of Jesus was the result of his love and reverence for God and his fellow human beings. His actions of driving out of the Temple, the money changers and the sellers of cattle, sheep, and pigeons, was a protest against the commercialisation and desecration of the Temple, and the over-charging of the pilgrims. "Take all this out of here," Jesus said, and stop turning my Father's house into a market." But his actions went deeper than that.

First, he was protesting that Israel was keeping its faith to itself, and not sharing it with others. God meant the Temple in Jerusalem to be a house of prayer for all nations, but Israel had restricted non-Jews to the noisy Court of the Gentiles. Jesus was protesting Israel's narrowness and exclusiveness.

In the second place, Jesus was rejecting and abolishing the ways that Jews were worshipping God. Its daily rituals, and especially its killing and offering of animals, etc, to God, were not what God wants. What God wants is the dedication of ourselves and our lives to God, and the practice of justice, love, and kindness, to everyone in need. God's messengers, the prophets, had been saying this for ages, and now Jesus too in his action of cleansing the temple, was also calling from everyone, a religion of the heart.

Lent reminds us that God requires us to keep giving God first place in our lives. As Scripture says: "God made us: we belong to God", and that "in God, we live, and move, and exist." Without the presence and power of God keeping us alive, we would crumble into dust. So, the ashes of Ash Wednesday came with the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust, you shall return." Lent also reminds and urges us to keep sharing our personal, family, and community resources with poor and needy persons. Lent also highlights our need to pursue positive self-improvement, working with God's amazing grace to become the best persons we can be. So, this wise anonymous saying applies: "Watch your thoughts; they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions, watch your actions ... they become your character."

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