

Homily for the Third Sunday of Lent, Year (B)

for St. Anthony Messenger Press Lenten Audio Series

by

Bishop Gerald Barnes

Temple for Christians

It is the Third week of Lent and most of us are in the midst of our Lenten practices. Some of us have put aside certain habits or preferences. Others of us are giving more time to acts of charity. And still others have decided to add to our daily schedules time for Mass, reflection and prayer. We recall Ash Wednesday's admonition to turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel.

These past two weeks we have meditated on Jesus' time in the desert and his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. We have joined Peter, John and James and witnessed Jesus' transfiguration. These two events are part of the new mysteries of the Rosary.

This week, the Third week of Lent, we see Jesus' anger as he enters the temple precincts. Jesus enters and sees priests and merchants, cattle dealers, bankers, hawkers and profiteers. He hears the noise, the shouting and hackling. He smells the odor of animals. He yells out for all to

stop. Like the prophets of old he recalls that the Lord does not want these kinds of sacrifices, these kinds of rituals. The Lord wants justice and integrity. Where is that to be found in the Temple? What has become of this sacred place?

For the Jewish people the Temple was the most sacred of places. The Temple is God among his people. The theme of the Temple is essentially that of Presence. The Lord Yahweh had told the people of Israel, "I shall be with you." This was their unique relationship with God. He was their God and they were his people. God's desire to be with his people is central to all of the Scriptures. He was with them in their Exodus from Egypt. He showed them the way with a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. He was present to them in the Commandments, the Arc of the covenant and the Meeting Tent. Yes, God does want to be present to man, but we also have the need of localizing God in time and place. With King David and Solomon's construction of the Temple, the people of Israel found security in that Yahweh was with them. He had a place to reside among them. But years passed and the Temple lost it's meaning as God's presence among his people. It was destroyed and the people exiled. But it was rebuilt again.

And again it degenerated into a mere sign of guarantee and security. It had become now a place of business and God, through the prophets of old, had told his people to move away from the practices they had become accustomed with and to live his Word, his message of peace, integrity, holiness, justice, love. But society had moved to false worship, social injustice and insecurity.

Jesus witnesses what has happened to the Temple. Jesus is the new Temple of the Lord. He is the new Meeting Tent. He is the life of God among the people. And he shares that life, that presence with us.

The question for us today is where do we see God's presence among us? Where is the Meeting Tent for us? Where is God's life among us? Jesus says that his Spirit lives among us and that our bodies become the Temple of the Spirit. We can meet God now in and through one another because the Spirit of God lives among us, lives within us.

Lent is a time for us to ponder how we live this presence of the Lord. How do I worship the Lord? Is it through Jesus, his teachings, his example, his commandments? How do I share with others God's life in me? Do others

experience God's compassion, his love, his understanding in me and through my life's actions? Do others witness his forgiveness, his peace, his charity in me and through me? Or have I let the Temple of the Lord in me become a den of thieves and hawkers, profiteers and abusers? Have I moved to a false worship giving more of my self, time and resources to gods I create: to money, status, power, control, work, sex and alcohol? Is there cleansing that is needed in me? Do I treat my body as a temple of God's spirit? Or do I abuse it by not taking care of my health, not respecting the parts of my body?

I need to ask also how I relate to others with and through this body. What do I need to do so that others experience God's life in me? Where do my children, my family, my friends, my co-workers see that God does live in me? How do I respect them, their dignity, their uniqueness? How do I demonstrate that I meet God through them? God has become flesh in Jesus and to love God is to love my neighbor.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to greet people in the traditional Indian style, her hands together as if in prayer. These hands are then extended in gesture to those she would meet, and with a slight bow of the head this

greeting said: "The divine in me greets the divine in you."
Can others see that divine in me? Can I truly witness to others all that I have received from God so that they always receive from me a respect for their dignity as God's creation?

Jesus cleansed the Temple when he saw what it had become and to remind us all that it is through him, with him and in him that we meet the Father and to him give all honor and glory.

Let us look to the remainder of this Lent and clean whatever in us needs cleansing. Let us move into the next weeks of Lent acknowledging our need for the Messiah; for the one that is the way, the truth and the life. Let us worship him, his presence among us, by loving one another. Let us not allow our worship to become shallow, compromised or self-serving.

God makes his promise once again to his people, to you and to me: "I shall be with you." May we acknowledge always his presence with humility and gratitude.