

Third Sunday of Lent Year B Readings and Commentary:

Celebration Summary: Bryan M. Cones If you are celebrating the first scrutiny at your Mass today, please go to that celebration summary. If not, the baptismal character of these days of Lent should still be a part of your preparation for this day. This can be easily done by letting the strong message of the readings and prayers come through. The loneliness of sinners, cut off from the love of God by their actions, is made even more poignant by the clear choice that God offers in both the readings and prayers. The commandments are not onerous and the love of God not easily contained, as the cleansing of the temple makes clear. And yet, these simple truths of the paschal mystery, of Christ crucified, Paul labels as a challenge. The prayers for this day focus on the need to be aware of our sinfulness, aware of our need for God's forgiveness in Christ, and truly aware of the help that God offers us in our time of penance. It is not complicated, not rocket science as they say, and this should give us hope. It makes it possible to dwell for a time on our sinfulness and need for forgiveness, confident that we can change with God's help. Do not try to obscure the need to think about sin, commandment and change. At the same time do not let the celebration be without hope, for the one who cleansed the temple of all that was corrupt is the same one who will offer his life for our salvation.

Lectionary Summary: Glenn CJ Byer Moral duty has nothing to do with 'my comfort' but has everything to do with following a moral command for the sake of duty. Even though a command might be uncomfortable for me, I am bound to follow the law. God does not merely advise us not to kill. God commands it. It doesn't matter whether we are happy or productive. Justified. Self-defense. National security. Revenge (capital punishment). "To insure our way of life." Thou shalt not kill. Cleansing the temple, making room to live the law of love given by the Christ does not allow for second guesses or "I told you so's." The call is total commitment to Christ.

First Reading Exodus 20:1-17

A reading from the Book of Exodus

In those days, God delivered all these commandments:

"I, the LORD, am your God,

who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.

You shall not have other gods besides me.

You shall not carve idols for yourselves

in the shape of anything in the sky above

or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth;

you shall not bow down before them or worship them.

For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God,

inflicting punishment for their parents' wickedness

on the children of those who hate me,

down to the third and fourth generation;

but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation

on the children of those who love me and keep my

commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain.

For the LORD will not leave unpunished

the one who takes God's name in vain.

"Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

Six days you may labor and do all your work,

but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD, your God.

No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter,

or your male or female slave, or your beast,

or by the servant who lives with you.

In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth,

the sea and all that is in them;

but on the seventh day God rested.

That is why the LORD has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

"Honor your father and your mother,
that you may have a long life in the land
which the Lord, your God, is giving you.
You shall not kill.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife,
nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass,
nor anything else that belongs to the neighbor."

The word of God

Reading Summaries First Reading: Maribeth Howell, OP Exodus 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17 Today's first reading, while only appearing on the third Sunday of Lent every three years, is a passage that is quite familiar to most of us. The majority of people who hear this text will probably recall a time when they were required to memorize the "Ten Commandments." What type of thought or serious reflection has been given to these words in more recent years? It may be helpful to consider the Decalogue within the context of the Sinai covenant. The first portion of the book of Exodus tells the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. This liberation is attributed to God, who called Moses to act as an intermediary between God and the people – both the people who came to be known as Israel and the Pharaoh. Immediately following the story of liberation the book focuses upon the formation of this new nation, Israel. It is within the context of this developing new identity that we might situate today's first reading. The text opens with a very clear announcement of who is speaking: it is "the Lord," the one who brought this people "out of the land of Egypt, the place of slavery." What follows is the proclamation of what we have come to refer to as the Ten Commandments. These words provide the newly formed people with clear guidelines and expectations. It would be presumptuous to even attempt a summary of the stipulations found within these verses. It may be best to simply recognize that they are serious statements about relationships, relationships with God

and with one another. While the first two commands clearly speak of how we are to relate to God and the last six are concerned with how we relate to one another, Patrick Miller, followed by Walter Brueggemann, has suggested that the third commandment (“remember to keep holy the sabbath day”), serves as a kind of bridge between the commandments. It is interesting that while the sabbath is devoted to God, it is celebrated with community.

Responsorial Psalm: Tom Conry Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11 Psalm 19 is clearly made up of two original songs. The selection sung today is from the second (Psalm 19B), which is a song of praise to the Torah. Two thousand years of mostly tragic history between Judaism and Christianity have irrevocably colored our understanding of Torah, the Law, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is the story of history from the creation of the world to the re-establishment of a free people in their own land, the land of their ancestors. The anti-Semitic interpretation of this narrative as a temporary collection of great and small commandments, now erased by the coming of Christ, is a misunderstanding of the New Testament, and this misconception has been responsible for uncounted pain and suffering. The Law or Torah is not a burden but a gift. It is what was recognized by Jesus as the reign of heaven – God’s work to be cherished and shared, the way of celebrating God’s presence in human society. This hymn is properly a celebration of the liberatory nature of creation: a story that, for all its twists and turns, ends in freedom and deliverance from oppression.

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,
but we proclaim Christ crucified,
a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom,
and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

The word of God

Second Reading: John Paul Heil 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 Main Theme: Christ CRUCIFIED is the paradoxical POWER and WISDOM of God for us. The scriptural promise that “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the intelligence of the intelligent I will set aside” (1:19) implies God’s destructive setting aside of the intelligence and wisdom of the world in favor of something else. That alternative begins to become explicit in terms of the “wisdom of God” (1:21). As Paul explains, “in the wisdom of God” the world did not through wisdom come to know or acknowledge God. God was thus pleased through the “foolishness” of the preaching--the preaching of the word of the cross that is “foolishness” for those being destroyed (1:18a)--to save those who believe, that is, “us,” who are those being saved by the power of God (1:18b) and thus on their way to full salvation by God in the final judgment. Although Jews demand “signs” and Greeks look for “wisdom” before they will believe, we Christians proclaim Christ crucified--a “stumbling block” for the faith of the Jews and “foolishness” for the faith of the Gentiles. But for us Christ- -a Christ “crucified,” the Christ of “the word of the cross” (1:18)--is “power of God and wisdom of God.” Paradoxically, this power and wisdom of God, by which God is saving us, is the foolishness and weakness that is wiser and stronger than human beings. It is stronger and wiser than human beings because God will destroy human wisdom and replace it with the powerful but paradoxical wisdom of God revealed in the message of Christ crucified.

Gospel John 2:13-25

A Reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Since the Passover of the Jews was near,
Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there.

He made a whip out of cords

and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers

and overturned their tables,

and to those who sold doves he said,

“Take these out of here,

and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.”

His disciples recalled the words of Scripture,

Zeal for your house will consume me.

At this the Jews answered and said to him,

“What sign can you show us for doing this?”

Jesus answered and said to them,

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

The Jews said,

“This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?”

But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Therefore, when he was raised from the dead,

his disciples remembered that he had said this,

and they came to believe the Scripture

and the word Jesus had spoken.

While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,

many began to believe in his name

when they saw the signs he was doing.

But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all,

and did not need anyone to testify about human nature.
He himself understood it well.

The Gospel of the Lord

Gospel: Tom Conry John 2:13-25 Here again we have a text with an appalling anti-Semitic subtext, not from John's gospel itself, but rather from centuries of misinterpretation. For example, the word that is translated as "the Jews" in this episode (tÜn iudaiÜn) is literally "the Judeans." It is simply the word that the Roman occupying forces used to describe what remained of the old southern kingdom surrounding Jerusalem. John uses the word continually to distinguish the Jerusalem aristocracy of Herod from Jesus' home area of Galilee to the north. The expression as it is used here then encodes the endemic hostility between the city and the countryside; the world of the affluent guardians of ritual purity on the one hand, and the world of those who cannot command justice on their own behalf on the other. In John it is these temple authorities, acting in concert with the Roman military, who will eventually conspire to murder Jesus. This event takes place near the beginning of John's gospel and is not the climactic incident that it is in Mark, Matthew, and John. In all of the gospels, however, it is the occasion for the plot that will eventually culminate in Jesus' arrest and execution. The temple was not only (or even primarily) a religious institution but also an economic one. This is a fact that is perhaps not so immediately obvious to us, but would be taken for granted by John's audience. It was the largest employer in the area, it was the building that dominated the landscape, and it was more or less a wholly owned subsidiary of Herod Incorporated. Significantly, John does not quote the other gospels in criticizing the temple a place of bandits (lestai) but rather as a marketplace (emporion).