

Father O'Connor's Homily for 3 March 2024
Third Sunday of Lent-B

Exodus 20: 1-17
1 Corinthians 1: 22-25
John 2: 13-25

There was a chain letter that was going around. It read: "If your pastor does not measure up, simply send this letter to six other parishes that are tired of their pastors too. Then bundle up your pastor and ship him out to the church at the bottom of the list. In one month you will receive 1,643 pastors, and one of them should be just perfect. Have faith in this letter. One church broke the chain and got their old pastor back in less than three weeks."

Well, Jesus was not terribly popular with the temple leadership in today's Gospel. They were ready to bundle Him up and ship Him out.

We like to picture Jesus as gentle, meek and mild. And so often He comes across that way in the Scriptures. But not today. He is in the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus makes a whip out of cords, and He is angry. He throws out those who are selling animals and changing money, and He says: "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

Why was Jesus so angry in this Gospel? It is important to know the real reason because people are often mistaken about this: as though it were sinful to have a parish clam bake or a strudel sale. No, it was not because of selling animals for sacrifice or exchanging Roman money for temple currency that Jesus was upset.

Animal sacrifice was part of the worship in the temple. People coming from long distances found it difficult to bring sacrificial animals with them, so as a convenience, they could buy an ox or sheep or some doves for sacrifice right there.

They did not use Roman coins in the temple because on the Roman coin was a picture of the pagan emperor, and the emperor had declared himself to be a god. So the temple had its own currency – and the worshippers would exchange the Roman currency for the temple currency.

Why was Jesus so angry? For this reason: those who were selling the animals for sacrifice had raised the prices sky-high, and they were gouging the people. And those who were exchanging the Roman currency for the temple currency had hiked up the exchange rates outrageously.

Jewish people were cheating other Jewish people for the sake of worship in the temple. This caused Jesus to become angry and throw out those crooked merchants for exploiting their own people in the name of God.

Now, does that ever happen in the Church? Does one Christian ever exploit another Christian? Does one Christian ever exploit someone who is not a Christian? I wish I could tell you that this never happens. But you know as well as I do that sometimes it does.

Does this mean that there is something wrong with the teachings of Jesus? Not at all. But sometimes there is something wrong with the behavior of Jesus' disciples.

There was a man who was recovering from back surgery one spring, and part of his therapy was taking a daily walk. The weather was nice on his first walk and many people had their windows open. He heard a piano student practicing Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" – and was really murdering it. The man made it a point to go by that house every day at the same time, believing that he would hear continuous improvement. But the piano student continued to massacre the piece.

Was the student's poor performance of Beethoven's composition a judgment on the composer? No, but it was a judgment on the piano-player.

Sometimes Christians do not always play their parts well. But this is a judgment on their poor performance and not on the way of life that Jesus taught us to live.

Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to forgive our sins so that we could live with Him forever in heaven – and so that, until then, we could live here on earth as His disciples, and as brothers and sisters.

I will leave you with a story that is a bit of a parable. It is about a stranger who came into town and wanted to go to church. He got to the church a bit early, found a parking place and parked his car. He was getting out of his car when another driver came along, rolled down his window and shouted at the visitor, "Hey – what are you doing? That's where I park! You took my place!" "Sorry," the visitor said, and moved his car to another parking space.

The visitor came into the church, found a pew, knelt down quietly and began to pray. A lady came into the church and said to him, "Hey – what are you doing? That's where I sit! You took my place!" "Sorry," he said, and he moved to another pew.

As Mass was about to begin, people were noticing that the stranger's hands had nail marks in them and his sandaled feet did too. They asked him: "Who are you? What's going on?"

He stood up, looked at them all and said, "I took your place."

So look at the cross. And what do you see? Jesus angry and calling down God's wrath upon us?

No, not at all. We see Jesus who loves us sinners so much – so much that "He took our place."

We love and serve a kind and merciful God, who is slow to anger, and we see evidence of His rich compassion all around us, if we take the time to notice.

Hear Jesus say to you: "I took your place. Now take my hand."

Or, as the hymn puts it:

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand.
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on, to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

*Text and music, Thomas A. Dorsey [1899-1993]
Breaking Bread Hymnal, #674*

Links to a performance of "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

<https://youtu.be/2MijFc2wwLo>

[Marshall Hall, Angela Primm, Jason Crabb - Take My Hand, Precious Lord \(Live/Lyric Video\)](#)

You took our place on the cross, Lord. Now take our hands, precious Lord, and lead us home.