

## Homily St Pius—St Anthony 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Lent Year B

Is Jesus angry? Who spilt his cheerios? Many people draw comfort from Jesus' witness today because he expresses emotion. It is as if he is closer to us because he also feels the whole range of human emotions. What a comfort that we have a savior who can also run through the whole spectrum of human feelings. (We could chart them through various scripture readings, like Jesus feeling sadness at Peter's denial-Luke 22:42-54, discouragement at city Jerusalem's condition-Matt 23:37, disillusioned at Nazareth's unbelief in him Mark 6:6, but also Joy & happiness such as at Cana John 2, or when his disciples return from mission telling their wondrous stories-Luke 10:17 or His feet anointing-Luke 7:36-50). Hebrews 4:15 reminds us that we have a shepherd who knows our range of emotions--"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin." But, today's "Feeling of the day" is holy anger or righteous upset. But keep in mind, this is not the only place in scripture that Jesus feels mad and upset. Mark 3:5 "Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart.." With such Feelings – we can say, "Welcome to what it means to be human!" The feeling itself is not sinful-They just happen- it is what we do, processing them properly or not, that introduces sin. Even the strength of them is not the measure, but how we respond to them. Positively, we need to be constructive, rise up and seek change or we can negatively stew and self-destruct in them. Ephesians 4:26 tells us, "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger...."

So today Jesus cleanses the Temple, and that is a sanitary way of saying it—He starts a stampede. He clears the stage. I say 'He cleans house and takes names'!

I think we can understand his motive most clearly, remembering what He stated earlier in Matthew's gospel 6:24 *"No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (mammon is more than money- it's the gain-profit from money)"* He is saying 'Religion and worship of God cannot be monetized'. The Temple and Money Problem is about the managers being 'robber-barons'. Talk about a monopoly; if you drag God in to make a sale—what an ultimate leverage- there's no competition. So religion cannot be the value, to force a sale. It happens oh yes, even today in the church— but Jesus was saying, 'Prayer is free-no one can dominate the channels of communication between God and a human soul'. Though again, it does happen. (like when a Church leader mandates a particular product for use in 'official worship' or that a parish must buy a 'specific service' to be in conformity with church laws). Often, coincidentally?, such practices happen to benefit those higher up the chain. If we don't think Jesus had concern to get money matters out of people's

prayers, then we have the book of Acts of the Apostles that settles it with the cases of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24) and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

We might wonder though what the animals and the money exchangers were even doing in the Temple? Keep in mind all of the temple laws (Leviticus-Deuteronomy) about necessary sacrifices (to be good worshipping Hebrew) of animals (whether ox, or sheep-goats or birds) to show God our thankfulness (it showed that we know that anything that we have, came from God, and our thanks and trust of God that He could give us again such blessing, is seen in our willingness to give it back). Well, part of the gift to God was that we give God our best animal-first fruits- not what is left over or unusable, so there were all these stipulations about it being a lamb without blemish, or a being youthful bird-not one on its last leg-wing) So, if I am traveling to Jerusalem all the way from Nazareth then I may not risk bringing a cow that may trip and injure itself or develop blisters on its feet on the way. I will wait until I get to Jerusalem to buy it or even safely at the temple door. But we all have experience of such 'gross inflation of prices'. Think of what it costs if I buy a bag of popcorn down here at the corner store versus buying it at the movie theater, or that I can buy ten hot dogs down here at a food truck for what I pay for one at the ball stadium. And in Temple, who does this hurt most? The poor, it cuts them out from even feeling like their prayer matters. And that angered Jesus. The temple is the Father's house; everyone should be able to offer prayer there; everyone is a child of God. Everyone should find a place and be included in the Temple prayers.

I find Jesus' cleansing of the Temple to be his statement that it is never wise or just to put a price on prayer. That when it comes to business and commerce around the temple/church, the goal is never increasing more material gain (ever) but always it should be increasing spiritual gain. The measure of good religion is not more dollars, but more prayers being offered-more time spent worshipping God, more care cultivated for other people, more understanding and concern for the most important matters of life- our relationships to other people. I think Jesus is saying that when it comes to business sales, mixing religion into it opens the relations to manipulations and exploitation. It introduces competing motives, complicates relations. I imagine we've all had experiences of money or business interests messing up relationships, and such monopolizing of God over other people also worsens relations all the more. I've known people who refuse to do business with close friends or family, because they do not want to pull complicating tensions into the relationship. I knew someone who approached a neighbor and asked about buying their tractor, and the minute a negotiation started he sensed it wasn't going to go right, and he said, 'here I would rather give you this tractor than sell it to you.'

Or those who say, “I won’t give you a price for that job but if you get the supplies, I’ll give you my work and get it done. But I don’t want us to haggle over our friendship- or put a price on a friend’s contribution”. There is work like that; you just can’t put a price on it. And religious offerings or true interpersonal counselling or life-coaching similarly just cannot be appraised. For example, I know a marriage encounter retreat movement that operates missions completely on, at the end of the three day workshops, they just give an envelope and say, “You know what this weekend is worth, please remember us accordingly..... “ They still operate just fine. So, Jesus cleansed the temple to show that religion and prayer is a personal and free exchange between God and human souls. We know in our hearts what we owe God (and God absolutely does); above all, we owe God our prayer, we owe God our lives, we owe God care for all that He has made and that means one another, all the fellow children of His. That is why he calls the Temple, the Father’s House. It is His; and we His children enter it to offer our prayer together. There is no cover charge to get in the door of the sanctuary,, except an open heart oneself and a desire to recognize Him and thank Him accordingly with others.