

## 3rd Sunday of Lent

March 7, 2021

The scriptures for today's liturgy present Jesus as the ultimate prophet. Throughout Israel's history, God sent prophets to challenge and encourage people to keep the covenant by keeping the commandments we heard in the first reading. The behavior of Jesus in what's known as the cleansing of the Temple should be seen in the light of Jesus as a prophet. On that day, He was acting like every fiery prophet in Israel's history. People in the Temple, both buyers, and sellers would have had memories of Jeremiah and Isaiah's stories challenging people in a similar way. So, they ask Jesus what Israel had always asked its prophets. "What sign will you show us to prove that you are a prophet sent by God and that we should listen to your advice?" His answer is complex and profound, and of course, they don't understand. How could they? Jesus is a prophet and so much more. He is the messenger, and the message, the Word of God made flesh. He is the indestructible Temple in whom God dwells now and forever.

We should remember that the sellers and money changers had a right to be in the temple area. They were there to service the thousands of pilgrims with what they needed to worship God and offer sacrifice. Buying an animal at the Temple was more convenient than bringing an animal along on a long trip to Jerusalem. Foreign money with images of pagan gods and Roman emperors who claimed to be gods was offensive to pious Jews. Money changers exchanged foreign money with acceptable Jewish money. These services didn't have to get in the way of worship, but somehow, they did. Jesus said that the Temple should not have the ambiance of a marketplace but of a holy place. Convenience can sometimes erode conviction.

Lent is a cleansing time in the church year. It's a time to reappraise our worship spaces and approach them with respect. It's a time to cleanse our hearts of whatever gets in the way of keeping God a priority in our busy lives and schedules. It's a time to unclutter our physical space and our inner spiritual space. A time to ask Christ to help us say with conviction, "The Lord is our God – Him alone do we worship."

**Fr. Valentine**

Scripture Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/030721-YearB.cfm>