

3rd Sunday Lent B 2021 Live streamed with Baltimore Carmel

This year the Lenten season offers us three major covenantal moments in the history of Israel: the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abraham, and, today, the covenant with Moses and the people and the giving of Torah, of the Law.

On each of the Sundays the second reading has focused on the crucified Jesus.

On the past two Sundays, our attention was drawn to two major events in Jesus public life: his being tested in the wilderness and his transfiguration.

Today we are presented with another major event in his life: the Fourth Gospel's version of his powerful intervention in the Court of the Gentiles of the Jerusalem Temple.

In the Synoptic Gospels this very provocative event is placed at the very end of the public ministry and it becomes a major reason for his arrest, torture and execution. Historically, it most probably occurred at that time.

For his own reasons, the fourth evangelist moves the event up to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The effect of doing that is to place this provocation of the religious authorities and their strong reaction to it as an undercurrent of his entire ministry. His death (and

resurrection) are placed on the minds of the readers of this Gospel at its very beginning. Instead of the slow raising of the temperature what we have in the Synoptic Gospels, John's Gospel begins with the waters at a furious boil.

The Gospel writer changes and adds details to the Synoptic versions. The most significant change is his portrayal of Jesus as speaking on two levels about the destruction of the Temple and about the new temple or body where authentic worship and sacrifice will take place.

Jesus says to the Jewish authorities, using the imperative voice: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." What they hear him saying is: "Dismantle this

temple, and in three days I will rebuild it.” This is impossible, and they say so.

What Jesus is actually saying to them is: “Kill me if you must, but in three days I will rise from the dead.”

Again and again in John’s Gospel we have these two levels going on. Only those with full faith understand what Jesus is really saying. The Jewish authorities, who are outsiders, take him literally and so miss the meaning.

What Jesus is saying in this event probably comes from the full Christian faith understanding of him, thanks to his death and resurrection. It’s unlikely that the earthly Jesus spoke these words.

The action Jesus performs in the Temple cries out for

interpretation. John intensifies the scene by putting a whip into Jesus' hands. He certainly injured the pride of the sellers who were engaging in legitimate activity.

Jesus wasn't so much seeking to cleanse the Temple, make it a better Temple. He was doing something much more radical, something that could lead to his being excommunicated from his people. He was symbolically terminating the Temple, declaring its end as the place where God dwells in a special way. By interrupting the normal Temple activities—the changing of money from Roman coins with the emperor's image on it to Tyrean currency that had no human images on it and the buying of sacrificial animals with that money—Jesus was signaling that henceforth the dwelling place of God on earth is not a building that separates Jews from Gentiles

but his own person, his own body, as we are told in the Prologue: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

The risen Jesus Christ and his body, the People of God, is now the dwelling place, the Temple, of the Holy Mystery we call God. And, by blessed extension, the whole human race, and planet Earth, and the Cosmos are God’s dwelling place.

The old separation of the sacred and profane is no more. While churches and other dedicated spaces are still important for us humans beings, who are creatures of body and senses, those churches and holy places no longer corner the market on holiness. Wherever Christ dwells is holy. God does not create separation, we do. God creates

distinctions and differences and revels in them, but God does not create separation. That is an illusion we create by our fears and a reality we create when we sin against God, the neighbor, planet Earth, or ourselves.

A bit later in John's Gospel, Jesus will tell the Samaritan woman that, from now on, people will worship God in Spirit and in truth. That is, they will relate to God in Christ, who is *the* Truth, by the power of the Spirit. And that relating can happen *anywhere and anytime*.

From now on, there is no privileged place or time for relating to God. There is no place or time where God is closer to you than other places and times.

During this time of pandemic, most of us have not been

able to attend Eucharist in person and that has been a grave loss. I don't want to minimize that. But God, the infinite, all-holy One from whom all proceeds, the One Jesus called "Abba," is not closer to us or more available to us in the Eucharist than at other times in our lives.

What makes the Eucharist special is the richness of the symbolic, sacramental, expression of that closeness. The Eucharist helps us to be close to God, to relate to God, through Christ in the power of the Spirit.

But your growth and my growth in union with God can increase even when we are deprived of the Eucharist. If we accept this limitation in our lives with grace, in a deep spirit of "yes" to the reality of this limitation and with a yearning for greater intimacy with God even in and through this deprivation, then we are being united more

profoundly to God, and to one another.

If I suffer the impossibility of visiting a loved one in the hospital because of Covid, and say “yes” to the reality of that limitation and frustration, and love that relative or friend through that deprivation, I am growing in union with God and with that person even though I am being deprived of a much cherished way of being with them.

When suffer the loss of ordinary physical contact with family, friends, and colleagues, can that suffering, which proceeds from love and care, connect me to the crucified and risen Jesus?

Thanks to the universal presence of the Risen One, through whom we have full access to God Source of All, every time and place, every moment of consolation or

deprivation, is able to become the meeting place of ourselves and God. If we do not deny the reality of our experience and enter into it with yearning for God and with love for our neighbor, we are being given the intimacy that is so wonderfully signified in the Eucharistic breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup. The darkness and deprivation of our time is potential meeting place for ourselves and our God, if we allow ourselves to enter into it with patient love, and let God unite us to God's self on God's terms, not ours.

The Risen Christ is present everywhere and always and he is the place of meeting of ourselves and God.

This is the blessed good news of this morning's liturgy.