

Gospel Verse
Sunday, November 9, 2008
(8:30 AM Mass)

“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.

■ **Jn. 2:19-21**

It is the story of my life that the Sunday I've got to preach about money, Jesus is throwing out the money changers. What's the secret of my successful timing? And not only that, while I am asking you to dig keep into your own personal resources on behalf of the Body of Christ, our world (we don't know) may be on the brink of an economic melt down that we have not seen since the Great Depression. So, we're giving a choice here today of closing in on ourselves and circling the wagons and making sure that we are secure in holding onto what we have...or, to listen to what Jesus is doing today. Because he is performing a most radical surgery, a most radical change.

Today, he is not just cleansing the temple, he's destroying the system. He's saying there's a brand new way to reach God. This is what destroyed Jesus' physical body but opened up the gates of paradise to all. Because he's about to destroy the economic system. A system by which people made their living and by which we were able to touch God.

The temple was the place where the presence of the Divine was, the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, the courts, the outer courts and inner courts, the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holy...that's where God dwelled. And there was only one way you could get to God because for some reason we always believed that God was up here and we were down there. That God was angry because we had always failed him. And that the first time we made a mistake that we have to make some sort of a proprietary offering, some kind of sacrifice to make God happy.

Now, the original offering of all religions, of all peoples, of all cultures was human sacrifice. We know that by the time of Genesis, with the Abraham story, we changed that from human sacrifice to animal sacrifice. Now, if you wanted to get to God, if you wanted to touch the presence of God, all you needed to do was sacrifice an animal. A good animal. If you were poor it was a dog. If you were rich it was an ox, goat or sheep. So that by the time that Jesus comes along, 90% of the economy of the city of Jerusalem is the killing of animals, the penning of animals, the selling of animals, the transportation of them, the fees that the priests got.

At that time, this beautiful altar that we have here is nothing like the alters in the temples – they were bloody messes. That's where they sacrificed the animals and burnt the holocaust and watched the smoke go up to God. And, somehow, in the midst of that smoke they were able to touch God. And God touched them. That's how the entire economy went on. And Jesus came into this and said, 'It's done. It's over.' He literally turned the tables on them. He turned over the existing reality, the existing system, the business as usual, the economic way that they made their livings and he destroyed it and he set things free. The first thing he set free were the animals. It's only in John's gospel...this is recorded in all the gospels, this story, it's that important. It's only in John's gospel that the sets the animals free.

He's the new Noah. He's giving life now to all of creating and he's saying that God is now changing the rules and changing the world. This is a great transaction. This is a change we can really believe in is what's happening now. You don't have to spill blood to get to God. As a matter of fact if the temple is the place where God dwells, Jesus comes and he makes this incredibly bold statement – 'Destroy this temple, this place where God dwells, and I will raise it up in three days.'

Of course, the authorities come up to him and say, 'Are you crazy?' Because they are thinking in terms of a building. That God has to be in this place. And Jesus is saying, 'No, I'm not crazy at all.' 'This building

took forty-six years to build and we're still working on it. It's not done yet.' It's like a hospital, it's always under construction. Did you ever go to a hospital that's not under construction? It's always under construction. Well, they are still building the temple. He says, 'No, no, you don't understand.' Of course, they don't understand. Where does God dwell? In a building? Yes...but no.

God dwells in Jesus. He is the temple of the Spirit of God. He is the living presence of God. God is now available to Jesus. And Jesus is making himself available to all. All of a sudden you don't need to spill blood to get to God. All you need to do is go to and through Jesus. And he's saying, boldly, 'I will raise it up in three days'. How can he have the audacity, the boldness, to proclaim he is now the source of God? Well, he has the audacity to be able to say this because he's been touched by the source – the real place where God dwells.

The young carpenter from Nazareth comes to John the Baptist, his cousin, in the Jordan River. And the carpenter goes under water – and somebody else comes out! And the heavens open up and he hears the voice in the heavens saying, 'You are my son, my beloved. I dwell in you. You are now the temple of the Living God.' And all of a sudden God is as available as water. As water!

So we've got this magnificent reading that we have today from Ezekiel that says the temple has water coming out from it. And whatever the water touches it makes whole and it gives life and it makes fresh. And we've got that water coming out of the temple and it's going all over creation. And if there's salt water, it makes it fresh.

Now, where is the temple now? Where do we worship now? In the greatest hiding place of all. If we just knew how to get there. The last four or five weeks I've been having the kindergarteners and the first graders come into the church and showing them the temple and the place where God dwells and the place where God is hidden. And we genuflect before the tabernacle and say that is the presence – the Eucharistic presence, the sacramental presence – of Jesus is.

I say we only do that now so that you can begin to understand where Jesus is really hidden. The hardest place for you to ever see him. And they go, 'Where's that?' I say, 'Look around. In you. In you. And you. And you.' You are the temple. 'You are the temple', St. Paul tells us. You are the living stones that make up the Body of Christ. Christ is in you. Christ is available to you. God is available to you. The Power of the Divine is available to you. The Source of All Life is available as you enter the depth of your heart.

But you've got to cooperate. There's something you've got to do. You've got to cup your hands and go deep, deep, deep, deep in to the well of God's loving water to drink the freshness that gives you life. And if you don't do that...

There's a true story about a good-sized boat that was off South America. And they were lost at sea but weren't far from shore. They just didn't know in the midst of the fog and the waves that were battering around. And they ran out of food and water and began to die. It was like the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner – Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink. And they were literally dying of thirst. What they didn't know was that being this close to the shore there was a fresh water aquifer. And the power of this fresh water aquifer was literally pushing the salt water around and they were surrounded by fresh water. What they didn't know was that all they needed to do was cup their hands, go deep, and drink of the life-giving water. And they died of thirst. True story!

Another true story – In the world in which we are living today we are dying of thirst. We are surrounded by the richness, the wisdom, the grace, and the love of God and we are holding onto what we think we have. It is an old system that just cannot feed us any longer or slake our thirst. And all He asks us to do now is to go deep. Go deep. 'Peter, go into the deep water and get your catch of fish.'

What do you need to do...and this is what it means to be a steward of God – To dare to believe that under there is an unending aquifer of grace that is seeking you. It is true that the thirsty seek water. But, in God the water seeks the thirsty. And God is seeking us.

But we've got to prime the pump. Like old Joe in the middle of the desert who comes to the pump and is dying of thirst. And he sees on top of the pump a glass of water and he's about to pour the glass of water down his throat. And he sees the sign that says, 'Do not drink this water. For, if you drink this water you will die of thirst. There is nothing more. However, if you take this water in this glass, and you pour it down the pump, and prime the pump there is more water than you know what to do with to wash your hands, to clean your feet, to quench your thirst. And then fill the cup for others! That's it. That's it. That's what it means to be a participant into the life of God. A steward to God's manifold graces and gifts. That's all it becomes. That's all that we need.

Now, that is radically different from the old, economic system that says God is out there and we're out here and we've got to pay to get to God and we've got to sacrifice to get to God. I want to say to you as clearly as I can, 'That temple is collapsing'.

Of all the times for me to sit and preach a Stewardship Sunday, this I probably the worst time in my priesthood, economically, that I've ever had. Honestly, what I want to preach to you today more than anything else isn't tithing, isn't giving to the Church, isn't going into your pockets, it's the Gospel. It's the Good News. Because I am absolutely, utterly convinced that if we dare...this is the real audacity of hope – That the aquifer is there. There there's more than enough. God is not going to fill this world with his inhabitation, with his Being and not be able to feed it. We have not yet learned yet to prime the pump. I dare to believe the moment we hear the Gospel, and the Good News becomes part of us, resources are the least of our worries. There's more than enough to go around. There's more than enough to feed the world. But, as long as we hold onto the old economic temple, the old way, the one that Jesus overturned, the tables that Jesus turned.

I was looking at our own economy in our own country right now and I picked up some bills. On the back of the \$5 bill and \$10 bill and \$20 bill there's a temple. The United States Treasury, the White House and the Lincoln Memorial. Like the old banks – they are built like temples – strong. But that temple is collapsing before our very eyes. And the question for us is what do we do in the midst of that collapse? Circle the wagons? Hold onto what we have?

I was talking to some of the ushers before mass last night who had lived through the depression. And they were telling us how terrible the time was back in the 30s during the depression. But, how kind everybody was to each other because everybody was in the same boat. Their big fear was God forbid, should we go through that again! They were afraid we wouldn't be quite so kind to each other. And we would build walls and guns to protect whatever we have. To circle the wagons. And then die of thirst. There's another way. There's another circle. There's a bigger circle. Trust Him.

In Time Magazine this week there was a wonderful article talking about the circles of giving, or giving circles. They were saying that individually we can't make a whole lot of difference in the world but if we get together as a giving circle...and what they do is invite 20 or 30 people from the neighborhood who want to make a difference. And whether they put the money towards breast cancer or getting a well in Africa or feeding the poor in Darfur or fighting poverty, they can make a difference.

Can you imagine the difference we can make? An incredible difference. And the needs are unbelievable right now. Yesterday I got a number of calls from people right there in Elmhurst. One in our own parish, who cannot meet their rent. How do we respond to that? We say there's not enough to go around. There's not enough for me. I've got to take care of me.

It's amazing, I've been here four and a half months now and I've spent over \$40,000 of parish money for major and minor maintenance of our buildings. But, as important as they are, they are buildings. While God may dwell here in this tabernacle, there's another place where he dwells. So, earlier this week I realized there's some other place where we have to put our resources. And I immediately wrote a check for \$1,000 for the walk-in ministry. And tomorrow I'll be writing a check for \$2,000 for our own St. Vincent DePaul Society, which is our own little pet project over here.

Why? Because you have to prime the pump. We have to dare to believe. We have to dare to believe that God is as available to us with his rich resources as water. All we need to do is participate in what God is doing.

And what is God doing? He's giving. He's giving. He's giving everything.