Ever taken a look around at the statuary and iconography of Jesus that appear in most any Catholic Church?

Take here, for example. There's the crucifix, of course. Then there's the Sacred Heart, something that depicts the compassion of Jesus. We also have an icon of Jesus the Teacher behind the altar along with an icon of the Infant Jesus. Who doesn't love infants? They're so cuddly and non-threatening, so much so that there's another such depiction mounted on the back wall. And over the entrance to the church, there's a statue of Jesus carrying a lamb: Jesus, the gentle shepherd.

I suspect our images are fairly typical.

You know a representation of Jesus I don't think I've ever seen in a Catholic Church (or any Christian church, for that matter)? The angry Jesus. Have you ever seen a statue or icon of the angry Jesus? We know He was angry occasionally. After all, He was fully human as well as fully divine, so He had to have been angry every once in awhile. In fact, Scripture confirms this. He was sometimes angry with the Pharisees for reducing faith to empty rituals and observances; sometimes angry with His disciples for trying to impose on Him their own ideas (usually half-baked ones) of who He should be; sometimes angry with those whose actions mocked the faith they professed, as in today's Gospel.

Now, there's nothing in the fact that Jesus was occasionally angry that's inconsistent with His sinlessness. Anger is just an emotion. Emotions come, usually unbidden, and they go. Like any other emotion or impulse, what makes anger sinful is when it's volitional; that is, when we stoke it, or when we hold on to it, or when we allow it to motivate our thoughts or actions in a way that's harmful or unjust, or that damages our relationship with God or others.

We may rarely if ever see an angry Jesus, but, as today's Gospel makes clear, the moneychangers in the temple surely did. The question is: why in the world was He so angry with them?

It wasn't that there were moneychangers in the temple in the first place. In fact, the temple couldn't have operated without moneychangers, as Jesus knew perfectly well. When

pilgrims came to the temple and did what they were expected to do, make an offering and then purchase a dove to sacrifice, they were forbidden to do it with Roman currency. Roman coins were considered pagan tokens. They usually bore an image of the Emperor (human images were forbidden under Jewish law), and moreover, in Jesus' day, the Roman coins in circulation also bore an inscription that read, "Caesar Augustus Tiberius" — Tiberius was Emperor at the time — "son of the Divine Augustus." In other words, "Tiberius, Son of God". This was blasphemy; such coins could hardly be used at the temple, the dwelling place of God on earth. Pilgrims to the temple therefore needed to exchange their Roman currency for "temple coins," an acceptable internal currency. Hence the need for moneychangers.

So why was Jesus so angry? Because the moneychangers were notorious for exploiting pilgrims. They added a hefty profit to the exchange rate they offered, and if that weren't enough, they sold at fabulously inflated prices the doves and other small animals used for the sacrifices required of pilgrims. Pilgrims got fleeced not once, but twice, on every transaction.

Jesus was incensed because, as we heard, in "making my Father's house a marketplace,"[1] the moneychangers had placed their commercial self-interest above the practice of faith. In Matthew and Luke's telling of this same story, Jesus uses a word that means "robbers" or "pirates" to describe them — the same word he uses for those who'd beaten and robbed the traveler helped by the Good Samaritan.[2]

Jesus was angry because of what they'd introduced into a holy place: exploitation, self-interest, and practices that make a mockery of faith.

That's why we often hear this story during Lent. Do we include something in our practice of faith that doesn't belong there? Lent isn't the only time, however, for reflecting on what we, individually and collectively, introduce into our own temples, a point that Paul makes in our Second Reading today. As we heard, in writing to the church in Corinth, Paul reminds

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[1] Jn 2:16 (NAB)

[2] In Mt 21:13 (NAB) and Lk 19:46 (NAB), Jesus describes the moneychangers as "ληστηςα". See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, et. al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 57.240.

them that "[we] are God's building". Actually, our lectionary includes only part of that verse. The full verse reads, "For we are God's co-workers; [we] are God's field, God's building."[3]

Think about that for a minute. We're "co-workers" with the Lord in building His kingdom on Earth; we're the "field" in which He'll plant the seeds of hope and charity; we're the "building" that houses His presence in the world. No wonder, then, that just as Jesus expelled the moneychangers from the temple because they defiled it by their actions, it behooves us, too, to reflect individually and collectively on what we introduce into our own faith that doesn't belong there, and reflecting as well on the "temples" where we choose to spend our time. To where, in fact, do we make our "pilgrimages"? Where do we spend our time, our energy, our thoughts, our passion?

Identifying the things that are inconsistent with faith and which therefore result in our alienation from God and others is the heart of conversion, a lifelong process. As the Lord put it to the prophet Isaiah, "If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day … if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs, then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob …"[4]

And if not? Well, then we can expect to have our tables overturned by hearing Jesus say something He says more than once in the Gospel, "I never knew you; go away from me …"[5]

The heart of faith isn't ortho*doxy*, that is, thinking or saying the right things, but ortho*praxy*, *doing* the right things, an observation Jesus makes very pointedly in His Parable of the Two Sons in which a father asks his sons to spend the day working in his vineyard. One son is only too ready to assure his father he'll get right on it — but never shows up. The other says, "No way!", but changes his mind and does the work he was asked to do. "Which of the

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[3] 1 Cor 3:9 (NB)

[4] Is 58:13-14 (NRSV)

[5] Mt 7:23; Lk 13:24; Jn 6:64 (NRSV)

two did his father's will?"[6], Jesus asks before warning the "we'll get on it" sons among His listeners, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you."[7] The angry Jesus again? I don't think so. But the blunt Jesus? Definitely.

The problem with the moneychangers is that they *said* the right things; they were Jews, too, and — at least in their own estimation — faithful ones. They wouldn't have been allowed in the temple were this not true. But they didn't *do* the right things. And doing the right things involves more than simply not breaking the Ten Commandments, the "shall nots." In fact, the Commandments exist for the purpose of giving us the space, the ability, to do what's right, which Jesus defines as loving God and loving others,[8] not just for the purpose of avoiding what's wrong. Those are very different things, because it's entirely possible for one never to do anything that's wrong, but also never to do anything that's right. When, for example, we're told, "You shall not [take] the name of the Lord, your God, in vain,"[9] this is what the Lord is getting at. A better translation of the Hebrew is, "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God,"[10] and professing the name of the Lord while doing or advocating things antithetical to His grace, or disrespectful of the dignity of others, is a wrongful use, one for which our own tables may begin to topple, and they may begin to topple, too, if we fail to reciprocate the Lord's love and forgiveness, or to honor the dignity of others, *proactively* in deed as well as in creed.

Today's feast day commemorates the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome. People commonly suppose that the Bishop of Rome's, the Pope's, cathedral church is St. Peter's Basilica. But that's not correct. The Basilica of St. John Lateran in a different part of Rome is his actual cathedral church. If you visit it, you can see the *cathedra*, the chair or

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[6] Mt 21:31 (NAB)

[7] Ibid.

[8] Mt 22:36-40 (NRSV)

[9] Ex 20:7 (NAB)

[10] Ex 20:7 (NRSV)

throne, from which the Pope governs the worldwide Church. It's really a pretty simple white, upholstered chair. There's a message in that, too.

But today's feast isn't just about a Basilica, as majestic as it is. It's really about us. John tells us that "while [Jesus] was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing."[11] The same is true of us. People begin to believe in the Gospel — or begin to disbelieve in it — when they see the signs we're doing. And to help us do the ones that point others to the love and mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation of Christ, a little housecleaning never hurts.

[11] Jn 2:23 (NAB)