

Why did the Church give us the set of readings we just heard during Lent? It has to do with temples. On one level, Jesus is going to replace the Temple and he is going to initiate a New Covenant in his blood. I will briefly touch on this a little bit later. There is another temple hovering in the background which I will come to but first I need to set the stage by looking at the first reading.

What was the first reading about? The ten commandments. Actually there are more than 10. We have to combine and split to come up with 10. Somewhere I have a graphic on how different Christian communities divide and split them. Actually, in this section of Exodus, there are over 600 commandments. Why so many? God was trying to form the Jews into a more obedient people. In the beginning there was one commandment; it was broken. Then God gave Noah a couple more commandments which were broken. God gives Moses Ten Commandments; almost immediately the first commandment was broken. A whole bunch more followed. Some of them seem weird to our ears. Some were given to combat practices of their pagan neighbors; others were given for the safety of the community. Some of them make good sense even today. Check these out. "You shall not molest an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt." Aliens mean foreigners. God is saying: "Remember how you were treated. Don't treat other immigrants the same way." Another commandment: "You shall not repeat a false report." Meaning: don't spread lies and gossip—a HUGE problem in our society today! A third commandment: "Neither shall you allege the example of the many as an excuse for doing wrong." Meaning: Don't follow along with the crowd. Just because everyone else is doing it doesn't make it right. Another HUGE problem in our society!

In all of the commandments—and the laws of the Church—God is trying to form us into a more faithful people and this begins by laying down the rules. The first three of the 10 commandments are about our relationship with God. The other seven are about our relationships with each other. Jesus sums them up with the two great commandments: Love God with your entire being and love your neighbor as yourself. What was happening around the Temple in the gospel was a violation of both those commandments. Using God's house as a marketplace is a desecration of sacred ground which shows a hatred towards God, even if it wasn't intentional. Some of the merchants and money-changers were getting rich off of the poor pilgrims who were coming to the Temple to offer sacrifice; that is exploitation of our neighbors, not love of them. In addition to that, all of that activity was a distraction to prayer and worship. Jesus' cleansing of the

temple was done partly to drive those distractions out and get rid of the bad behaviors.

What's the connection to Lent? What is the other temple I hinted at? The Temple of the Holy Spirit. Where is that one at? There isn't ONE temple of the Holy Spirit; every single one of us here is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul told us that a few weeks ago. What does Jesus want to do to our temples during Lent? He wants to drive out everything that distracts us from loving God with our entire beings and that distracts us from truly loving our neighbors. During Lent Jesus wants to cleanse our temples.

Does this connect to the reading from Saint Paul? Absolutely. Paul said "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom." In the gospel the Jews demanded a sign of Jesus' authority to cleanse the temple. The scribes and Pharisees were always looking for more signs even though Jesus had already given them a ton of signs that he was the true messiah, the Son of the Living God. Finally he had enough and said: "You want a sign? I'll give you a sign. Stick around. Tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in three days. He was referring to his body which would replace the temple as the focal point of worship after his resurrection. The Jews looked for signs. So do we. There are some of us who always seem to be asking God for more signs when what he really wants is for us to learn to trust him even without tangible signs. We'll revisit this on Divine Mercy Sunday when we hear the gospel about Saint Thomas.

The Greeks look for wisdom. Wisdom is good but they—and us—often look for human or worldly wisdom. When we try to do things entirely on our own, relying entirely on our own intellect, thinking we are the ones in control, we make a huge mess of things. Look at the world around us in which God is increasingly being pushed to the margins. To be truly wise, we have to learn to see things as he sees them, which means we have to learn to think like Jesus which means we have to learn to see the world from a Biblical worldview. You have heard this language before. I'll come back to it another time.

Finally, if you forget everything else I just said, remember this: Jesus wants to drive out everything that separates us from him. How does he want to cleanse your Temple of the Holy Spirit?