

FIRST READING – B 3 LENT

A reading from the book of Exodus.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

God spoke all these words:
I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery;
you shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make wrongful use of the name
of the Lord your God,
for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.
Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.
Honour your father and your mother,
so that your days may be long in the land
that the Lord your God is giving you.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
You shall not covet your neighbour's house;
you shall not covet your neighbour's wife,
or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey,
or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – B 3 LENT

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

The message about the Cross
is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,
but we proclaim Christ crucified,
a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – B 3 LENT

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The Passover of the Jews was near,
and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves,
and the money changers seated at their tables.
Making a whip of cords,
he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle.
He also poured out the coins of the money changers
and overturned their tables.
He told those who were selling the doves,
“Take these things out of here!
Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”
His disciples remembered that it was written,
“Zeal for your house will consume me.”
The Jews then said to him,
“What sign can you show us for doing this?”
Jesus answered them,
“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
They then said,
“This temple has been under construction for forty-six years,
and will you raise it up in three days?”
But he was speaking of the temple of his body.
After he was raised from the dead,
his disciples remembered that he had said this;
and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.
When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival,
many believed in his name
because they saw the signs that he was doing.
But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them,
because he knew all people
and needed no one to testify about human nature;
for he himself knew what was within the human person.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Exodus 20:1-17 or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17

The short version of the Decalogue is attained by the omission of those parts that have a rather narrow and temporary application, namely, the prohibition of idolatry in the first commandment (according to the Latin-Lutheran enumeration, but the second commandment according to other traditions) and the abbreviation of the third (fourth) commandment. Anglicans are further accustomed to the abbreviation of the ninth-tenth commandments as “Thou shalt not covet,” a procedure that could have been followed here with advantage.

The Decalogue appears in two places of Scripture: here and in Deut 5. The two versions differ mainly over the grounds for the Sabbath commandment. The content of the second table (duty to the neighbor) is paralleled in many primitive legal codes. The first table (duty to God) is unique to Scripture. Both tables also differ from other codes in form. They are apodictic: “You shall.” The other codes are conditional: “If you do so and so, the consequence will be so and so.” Thus, the natural law is taken up and transformed by the insights of Yahwism.

It has been much debated whether, historically, the Decalogue originates from Moses. Contemporary scholarship looks rather more favorably on the traditional ascription. If it is correct, then Moses probably reinterpreted earlier codes in the light of the ethical monotheism for which he stood. Obviously they have undergone at least two later recensions—the one Deuteronomic (Deut 5), the other priestly (Exod 20).

With the exception of the third (fourth) commandment, all of the ten words have a timeless validity. The New Testament quotes the second table in several places and clearly regards it as valid for Christian believers. The Decalogue was a constant element in medieval catechesis and expounded in the Reformation catechisms as the summary of Christian moral obligation. It has been frequently used as a form of self-examination before Communion. In Christian use it has to be understood, of course, in the light of our Lord’s teaching as given in the Sermon on the Mount.

Responsorial Psalm: 19:8, 9, 10, 11

A different selection of verses from this psalm is used at the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday. There its primary reference is naturally to the Eucharist.

Here the focus is on the deliverance of the just person from affliction, recalling the deliverance of Isaac. Note especially the phrase “Thou hast loosed my bonds.” In later Judaism the story of Isaac was called the *Akedah*, or “binding of Isaac.”

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Paul had a great deal of experience in preaching to both Jews and Gentiles. He found again and again that the Jews wanted a sign, that is to say, a legitimating miracle (as in today’s gospel—John 2:18) to authenticate his apostolicity and the truth of his message.

The Greeks, on the other hand, looked for wisdom, that is to say, they were prepared to accept Christianity if it was presented as “wisdom,” or “gnosis”—that is, if it brought a convincing understanding of

the universe and of the place of humanity in it, so that one could thereby be released from the trammels of earthly existence and reunited with one's heavenly origin.

It was wisdom rather than signs that the Corinthians, who were mainly Gentiles, desired at this time. Later on, however, by the time 2 Corinthians was written, they would be impressed by Jewish-Christian preachers who came along offering signs. Paul does not altogether repudiate the religious quest of either the Jew or the Gentile, but he corrects it by the message of the cross.

The cross is power (dynamis, the word frequently used for "miracle" and corresponding to "sign") and wisdom. But it is a paradoxical kind of power and wisdom—a foolishness (note the chiasmic construction) in human eyes that is wiser than human beings, and a weakness that is stronger than they. Only believers can penetrate the wisdom behind the folly, and the power behind the weakness. For all unbelievers, the message of the cross remains a scandal (for Jews) and folly (for Greeks).

Gospel: John 2:13-25

The Fourth Gospel has a version of the cleansing of the Temple that is parallel to, but independent of, the Synoptic version. John's tradition combines two elements found separately in the Synoptists:

- (1) the cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:15-19);
- (2) the prediction of the Temple's destruction (Mark 14:58 par.).

There are other features not paralleled in the Synoptists:

- (1) the whips: a greater degree of force used by Jesus (a feature that has been taken up in recent theologies of revolution);
- (2) the citation of Ps 69:9: this was a psalm traditionally used in the early church's passion apologetics;
- (3) the interesting statement that the incident took place when the Temple had been forty-six years in building—pointing to the date 28 C.E. We take it that these features were already present in the Johannine tradition.

The evangelist himself seems to be responsible for the following features:

- (1) the shift of the cleansing of the Temple from Holy Week to the beginning of the ministry. (Does that mean that he is also responsible for the remark about the forty-six years? Alternatively, following Raymond Brown, we may suppose that the saying about the destruction of the Temple belonged to this year already before John, and that John has shifted the cleansing to the earlier date and thus combined the originally separate traditions of the cleansing and the prophecy.);
- (2) the statement that Jesus was referring to his body in the saying about the destruction of the Temple.

We will concentrate on the meaning of these two redactional features.

(1) The reason for the shift of the incident to the beginning of the ministry will be a programmatic one. John wants to make Jesus lay out all his cards on the table right at the outset. The destruction of the Temple, that is, the end of the Jewish dispensation and its worship, is the ultimate purpose of Jesus' whole ministry.

(2) Closely connected with this is the second redactional feature. This expresses the positive side of Jesus' program, just as the destruction of the Temple expresses its negative aspect. The old order of worship is to be replaced by a new one—an order focused no longer on the old Temple but on the Body of Christ.

In what sense is "Body of Christ" used here? Does it mean the ecclesial body in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline sense? Or is it the glorified humanity of Christ? The second sense seems closer to Johannine theology elsewhere (see John 1:14), but we cannot altogether rule out overtones of the Pauline meaning.

Reginald H. Fuller