

Lent

March 19, 2006

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Ex 20:1-17 or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17 / 1 Cor 1:22-25 / Jn 2:13-25

For my Lenten discipline I am letting the Sunday gospels suggest an area of fasting. This week we hear the story of Jesus getting angry and whaling on the money changers. It's the only time we know of that Jesus acted on his anger and this event is one of the few that is recorded in all four gospels.

MEDITATION

Apparently, his anger was difficult to ignore! John tells us that Jesus took a whip and drove out all those who were selling and buying. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, specific mention is made of the money changers. Only Jewish coins were accepted to pay the temple tax. Jews who had Roman coins went to the money changers who were cheating by exacting a high rate of exchange.

The first reading helps us understand why Jesus was so angry. He was a good Jew and obeyed the commandments. The first commandment is, "You shall have no other gods before me." Buying and selling holy things for profit and thereby turning the temple into a marketplace is putting little gods—the god of mammon or material things—before the one, true God. In the history of our Church we have known this sin and it was one of the causes of great division. Martin Luther, then a Catholic monk, was scandalized by the selling of indulgences and called the Church to task for this practice. The Church eventually reformed, but not before the Christian community was divided.

There are many gods vying for first place in our lives. They might be obviously false gods like addiction, unconscionable plea-

sure seeking, or shopping until we drop. Or our false gods might be good things: home, family, boyfriend or girlfriend, health, work, political involvement, even parish community.

How do we know when we are simply following our God-given passion and when we are dealing with a false god? "When in doubt, check it out." Take it to honest prayer. Talk to a spiritual director or confessor. This week, let's examine our attachments and pray for the ability—and the courage—to fast from false gods.

Paige Byrne Shortal
sundaybulletins@liguori.org





Dear Padre

What qualifies a confession as valid?

I went to confession recently and I was much surprised when the priest said the whole prayer of absolution prescribed by the Church, omitting however the phrase, "and I absolve you..." Would you please explain whether this confession was valid? Should it be repeated?

Edward

Dear Edward,

It is the priest's responsibility to celebrate the sacraments properly, validly, and licitly. Each sacrament has what is called matter and form. The matter part of the sacrament of reconciliation is the sins you confess, and the form is the words of absolution.

QUESTIONS? e-Mail the Padre
dearpadre@liguori.org

Part of the form of absolution is the words you did not hear, or that the priest did not say. These words are not optional. The priest may have the custom of saying these words to himself. The usual thing to do is to assume the sacrament was properly celebrated. It is rarely of value for anyone to repeat a confession, and I do not advise you to do so in this circumstance.

Sometimes a person forgets to confess a grave sin. In that case, the person should confess the sin the next time he or she goes to confession, but should not repeat the sins previously confessed. If a priest intends to withhold absolution for some reason, he will tell you. Since you celebrated the sacrament in good faith, you should assume the priest did also. The grace of God will supply whatever may be lacking. Given your concerns, you may wish to avoid confessing to this priest in the future.

Father Joseph Nolen, C.Ss.R.

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READINGS

Monday • March 20

Saint Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary
2 Sm 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16/Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22/Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Lk 2:41-51a

Tuesday • March 21

Lenten Weekday
Dn 3:25, 34-43/Mt 18:21-35

Wednesday • March 22

Lenten Weekday
Dt 4:1, 5-9/Mt 5:17-19

Thursday • March 23

Lenten Weekday
Jer 7:23-28/Lk 11:14-23

Friday • March 24

Lenten Weekday
Hos 14:2-10/Mk 12:28-34

Saturday • March 25

The Annunciation of the Lord
Is 7:10-14; 8:10/Heb 10:4-10
Lk 1:26-38

Sunday • March 26

Fourth Sunday of Lent
2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23/Eph 2:4-10
Jn 3:14-21

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