

Lent 3B

A man had a dream in which he was taken up to heaven. He was wandering around when Jesus came along and let him have a vision of something happening down here on earth. It was a church on a Sunday morning and Mass was being celebrated. The organist was playing away, the man could see the fingers move and the keys go up and down - but he couldn't hear a sound. He could see the choir, watch them open their mouths, and sing all the words - but he couldn't hear a sound. He watched the priest and people open their mouths to say all the prayers - but, once again, the man couldn't hear a sound. He was puzzled, so he turned to Jesus and asked him why the silence. Jesus replied, 'Well you see, unless these people are sincere in their worship, we cannot hear them up here'.

Now, one of the ways where we put our worship at risk is when we come to Mass not properly disposed. Sinful trends, for instance, can become second nature to us. The Temple traders were a bit like that. Jesus 'saw red' when thousands of his poor fellow countrymen were being defrauded by unscrupulous money changers in the Temple precinct which was supposed to be a place of worship. They will have been doing this for years without anyone challenging them. How could they genuinely worship God inside the temple if outside they were swindling the poor people?

Sin can become embedded in a culture. I'm told that corruption is so endemic in some countries that it literally becomes a way of life for people. The Chinese leader said this week that fighting corruption was at the top of his agenda. A priest on the foreign missions once told me that one day a policeman stopped his car and said he was speeding but if he paid him £50 that would be the end of the matter. Is there a cultural sin we've succumbed to which could affect how we worship? For instance, in our secular culture, for a lot of people, Sunday, the Lord's Day, is not sacred anymore – just another working

weekday. We seem to have too easily accepted this cultural shift.

Another way that my worship of God may be compromised is when we treat the house of God as a 'kind of bazaar'. Isn't that what Jesus said: 'stop turning my Father's house into a market'. There are not many places these days free of noise of one kind or another. The news carried a item last week about young people putting their hearing at risk because they never give their ears a rest. With the proliferation of smart phones there is a lot of unnecessary talk going on. Have you ever thought of giving up 'making calls' on your mobile for Lent and just deal with the incoming stuff?

But at least in the house of God we should be able to find a place of peace and quiet conducive to worship. Regrettably that is not always the case. The presence of the Blessed Sacrament means that the church should be a sacred space. Contemplatives tell us that God can only be found in the stillness.

So today we ask the good Lord to clear out of our spiritual temple all those things which makes our worship of Him less than genuine. Only then, will there be a resonance between how we worship here on Earth and how it is received in heaven.