

Lent 3B

A man had a dream. He was wandering around in heaven 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, but he couldn't hear a sound. He could see the congregation singing but again, silence. He watched the priest say the prayers - but, once again, there was no sound. He was puzzled, so he turned to Jesus and asked him why the silence. Jesus replied, 'Well you see, unless people are sincere in their worship, we cannot hear them up here'.

Malpractices, which inhibit true worship, can become embedded even in one's culture. The Temple traders were using a religious event to fleece the pilgrims showing little concern for their spiritual welfare. More serious still, people were being short-changed by money changers in the Temple grounds which was considered a sacred space. Jesus was aware of all these malpractices and that is why he saw red. They will have been doing this for years without anyone confronting them. How could they genuinely worship God inside the temple if they were swindling the people outside in the grounds?

Even in catholic countries malpractices are tolerated. A priest on the foreign missions in a catholic country once told me that one day a policeman stopped him, pulled him over in his car and said he was speeding, which he denied but if he paid him £50 that would be the end of the matter. Is there a cultural sin which we've succumbed to which can affect how we worship God? For instance, in our secular culture for a lot of people, Sunday, the Lord's Day, is not sacred anymore – just another working day. The church considers it a day of rest from excessive weekday chores – especially money-making enterprises. Jesus said in the gospels that we cannot worship both God and mammon. Mammon means money. The

traders in the temple grounds had their hearts set on Mammon – the worship of God took a back seat or no seat at all for that matter.

Another way that my worship of God may be compromised is when I treat the house of God as a 'kind of Sunday bazaar'. Isn't that what Jesus said: 'stop turning my Father's house into a market'. Some people, for instance, are of the opinion that Lourdes is too commercialised. There are not many places these days free of noise or din even in places of worship. When we come to Mass we are coming from the secular to the sacred and the atmosphere in our churches should reflect this. Contemplatives tell us that God can only be encountered in the stillness. Without it our public worship will leave a lot to be desired.

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.