Breaking Open the Word

The Saving Word

Third Sunday of Lent / B — 3 March 2024

GOSPEL

Jn 2: 13-25

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up'. The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

■ **The Gospel of the Lord.**

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CHRIST, THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD

The image of a limp, distorted body on the cross, which we know as the crucifix, has a long history of development. While its central place with the altar in our churches and its focus for personal devotion may seem normal to us, it is an anathema to others. How is this the focus of our belief and worship? A reminder of the sacrifice, its very presence points to the resurrection, salvation and the hope of everlasting life with God who loves us.

Today's readings grapple with this dilemma. Paul's words to the Corinthians capture something of the complexity of those early days of preaching the Good News: "preaching a crucified Christ." Who would believe in a dead Messiah? Yet Paul insists "but to those who are called, Jews and Gentiles, a Christ who is the power and wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). Paul's tussle with this is juxtaposed with John's account of Jesus cleansing the Temple where Jesus says, "Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). This imagery made no sense to the Judeans for this Temple, the Holy of the Holies and dwelling place of God took 46 years to build. The narrator adds that the temple Jesus spoke of was his own body. The narrator also recounts that the disciples had heard Jesus' words but it made no sense to them either until the event of the resurrection. Let us contemplate Christ as the power and wisdom of God.

Dr Rosemary Canavan

FIRST READING

Ex 20: 1-3, 7-8, 12-17

A reading from the book of Exodus.

The Law was given through Moses.

God spoke all these words. He said, '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 gods except me.

You shall not utter the name of the Lord your God to misuse it, for the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it.

'Honour your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God has given to you.

'You shall not kill.

'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 his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his.'

■ **The word of the Lord.**

Longer form, 20: 1-17.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 18: 8-11. R. Jn 6: 68

R. Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.

1. The law of the Lord is perfect, / it revives the soul. / The rule of the Lord is to be trusted, / it gives wisdom to the simple. **R.**

2. The precepts of the Lord are right, / they gladden the heart. / The command of the Lord is clear, / it gives light to the eyes. **R.**

3. The fear of the Lord is holy, / abiding for ever. / The decrees of the Lord are truth / and all of them just. **R.**

4. They are more to be desired than gold, / than the purest of gold / and sweeter are they than honey, / than honey from the comb. **R.**

SECOND READING

1 Cor 1: 22-25

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

We are preaching a crucified Christ, a scandal to many, but to those who have been called, the wisdom of God.

While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, here are we preaching a crucified Christ; to the Jews an obstacle that they cannot get over, to the pagans madness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

■ **The word of the Lord.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Jn 3: 16

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory!

God loved the world so much, he gave us his only Son,

that all who believe in him might have eternal life.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory!