

## **March 1, 2015 Cleansing the Temple Homily**

My brothers and sisters, several years ago a prominent journalist, and former winner of the Pulitzer Prize, writing for the Wall Street Journal James Stewart, wrote a rather controversial book, entitled "*Den of Thieves*" which attracted enormous world-wide attention. In this book the author told a sordid tale of greed, corruption and arrogance on Wall Street, the financial capital of the world. Perhaps some of you may remember the so-called "insider trader scandal", in which wealthy investors used privileged information to seek an unfair advantage over others, who played by the rules. Oddly, what particularly infuriated critics was the title the author chose for the book as it was viewed as a reference to words spoken by Christ when he rid the Sacred Temple in Jerusalem of the moneychangers. Although the words "den of thieves" does not appear in John's account of the incident, this language does appear in accounts recorded in the first three Gospels.

During Our Lord's time, the temple is the physical heart of Jerusalem and of the Jewish people. As one scholar writes:

"The temple is nothing less than the earthly dwelling of God, the place where the one Eternal God, who is present everywhere, abides in a privileged manner in the midst of the chosen people."

Jesus came to the temple very much in the role of a prophet. The temple had become commercialized and the moneychangers were likely taking a big commission. The house of prayer had become a business. "Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace" said Christ (Jn.3:16). The Father's house had become defiled, polluted. Business dealings had taken the place of prayer! The first commandment is clear: "You shall not have other Gods beside me" (Ex.20:3). To pretend to worship the true God while at the same time exploiting others and neglecting the weak and vulnerable constitutes a great act of sacrilege.

Another story: Etty Hillesum was a young Dutch, Jewish convert to the Catholic faith. Her earthly life ended at Auschwitz, on November 30, 1943 where she and so many of her comrades were gassed to death by the Nazi's. Etty had a deep sense of the value of each person as the "Home of God". When she was at the Nazi deportation camp Westerbork, awaiting her final deportation to Auschwitz, wrote the following words:

"And I promise you, yes I promise you, that I shall try to find a house and a roof for you in as many houses as possible. There are so many houses, where I will bring you in as guest of honor".

One of the lessons we can derive from today's Gospel is that we Christians are now called to be the home, the dwelling place of God. Perhaps we are not even aware of the sacred space within each one of us. Let us consider the sudden arrival of Jesus in the temple of our soul. Can Jesus make Himself at home and so speak with us as a friend speaks to a friend? Is our soul a house of prayer?

Lastly, let us ponder the mystery of the cross. "Zeal for the Father's house" (Jn. 3:17) led Christ to his passion and death. Let us ask ourselves if we are zealous in our faith?

Amen.