

3rd SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR B HOMILY ESSENDON 2021
TRANSFORMING THE TEMPLE CULT AND UPSETTING THE TEMPLE POLICE AND FREE
MARKETEERS/PROFITEERS

Jn 2.13-25 Ex 20.1-17 1Cor 1.22-25

When we think about it it's interesting to see how many films continue to be produced in relation to the Jesus story. From *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, to more modern times, we might remember in particular *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, less so Mel Gibson's rather dark and sadistic *The Passion of the Christ*, which I certainly wouldn't recommend. (Some years ago, a well meaning person thought it good to show in a nursing home during Holy Week before Easter, and it unfortunately traumatized some of those who watched it!)

In the 1990 film titled *Jesus of Montreal*, we see an updated interpretation of this scene of Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the sacred site of the Temple to Daniel, as the Jesus figure in the film, at one point, overturning the film director's cameras, microphones and lights, as he physically intervenes, in objection to the base exploitation of one of his female friends (perhaps a contemporary theme in the present climate!), and drives out the advertising clients. Daniel and his friends have been engaged by a Montreal parish priest, Father Leclerc, to update the annual Passion Play, and so they do, but to the ire and objections of the priest, who thinks they have gone too far in their interpretation of the Jesus story, even though he is the one who asked them to contemporize it!

Behind the scenes, the priest has a few skeletons in his own closet, and he also fears the reaction of the higher ups, being the bishop and those involved in the institutional church. Traditions must be maintained at all costs, and the people need entertainment, not being challenged to think for themselves about what Jesus' message means for them in the way they live their own lives. Not only does the director Denys Arcand challenge the institutional church, however, but even moreso the false gods of secularism, in terms of the obsession with profit-making and disregard for the dignity of the person. Given the recent Royal Commission into Aged Care, and its dark revelations about neglect and resulting abuse of those among the most vulnerable of our society, that message retains its relevance for today as well. (I might add, just in the past week I have been in 3 of our local nursing homes, with Mass in Arcadia and Trevi Court, and my observation is that the personal and pastoral care there, I am confident and happy to say, is first rate!)

I quote one reviewer at the time: "*Jesus of Montreal is an inventive, witty and illuminating religious work of art. It is a telling critique of institutionalized Christianity and a savage assault on the hallowed idols of modern western society.*"

And I well remember my contemporary friend Joe Doolan, originally from Essendon, as assistant priest at Hadfield in 1981 or so, stirring up the parishioners with an acting out of the scene disrupting the reading of the Gospel at Mass, with youth group members running into the church, bouncing footballs and calling out 'Herald' (if you remember the daily evening paper back then), carrying newspapers. They weren't quite ready for such a literal wakeup call, but people certainly remembered the event, it had the required effect, in a way!

Today's Gospel moves to John from Mark, as we hear of Jesus 'cleansing' the Temple, as the commentaries refer to it. (Although I find **cleansing** an offensive word, with 'ethnic cleansing' still an evil in some parts of our so-called modern day world). All Gospels refer to the event, where we see Jesus quite worked up about the hypocrisy he sees about him, particularly with the religious leaders and those associated with the Temple cult or worship rituals, missing the point of what its true purpose is. John places the event early on in Jesus' public ministry, as the others have it much later, as it provides the Temple police and religious leaders in general, with an excuse to go after Jesus. For John, it sets the tone for opposition to Jesus challenging the status quo, and looking to the heart, seeking sincerity and truth in revealing a God of love and compassion, not a capricious God requiring ritual and sacrifice. And Jesus stirs them all up in the process of enlightenment.

As we well know, ritual has its place as we gather here now, to celebrate in Word and Sacrament for Eucharist, but the flow on effects are about active discipleship. Jesus' words here are about him replacing the Temple cult in his own person, with the promise of resurrection to new life, and ongoing presence with those who turn to him in faith.

And now we have a short AV reflection on life in Tanzania, with Oliva learning literacy and numeracy skills as an adult through the support and local involvement of Caritas.

We are reminded the Project Compassion theme for this Lent of 2021 is “*Be more*”, taken from Oscar Romero’s words: “*Aspire not to have more, but to be more.*” So, once again, as we approach the half-way mark of the season, don’t forget to continue to contribute through your envelopes or boxes, or credit card or on-line donations.

john hannon

7th March 2021

894 words