

### Three things

(Ex.20:1-17; 1 Cor 1:22-25; Jh.2:13-22)

\* In time of the second Temple, when Jews celebrated Passover and Pentecost, the pilgrims ascended to Jerusalem. Moving up they sang the “Penitential Psalms” (6,32,38,51,130,143). The mystery of their ascension is hidden within the five levels that start outside of Judea up to Jerusalem, up to the temple, up to the courtyard, up to the Holy place and finally, up to the Holy of Holies. Friends, you might have noticed that the significance of our five week Lenten pilgrimage also can be seen as a gradual ascension to the upper place. Each week of Lent marks the specific theme of preparation for Easter.

\* This third week of Lent, the Word and the Spirit prepare us to discern and avoid three foolish things: the abolishment of the Ten Commandments; the viewing of Jesus as an universal peacemaker; and attempting to comprehend “Christ crucified” by human reason.

\* The lack of appreciation of God’s 10 Commandments is the result of fragmented teaching that concentrates on the Gospel. In fact, the flesh prefers the Gospel, it doesn’t like the Law. Now, let’s see the problem. Christ is our justifier, not the Law. St. Paul says, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin,” (Rom 3:20). Through given faith in Christ we are justified and preserved by this grace. (Rom.3:23-25). But after all, a man might think that the function of the Law lost its importance from the moment of his believing in Jesus Christ. Moreover, viewing the Law as the power of sin can increase the negative perception. Now, the Law is turned into a troublemaker in one’s head. The law is a killer. The Law is the power in Satan’s hands. It is the cause and effect of death. And it is true!!! (Rom 7:8-11; 1 Cor. 15:55.56). But it is not the full truth. In (Rom 7:12) Paul says, “... the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” The Law unveils God’s wisdom and mercy if it’s been kept. The following illustrations can help to see the point.

\* A certain man, “...Berkowitz, the Son of Sam killer, became a Christian in prison. There is no arguing the fact that the Gospel did reach him,” said a reporter. “He received and believed the message of Christ as we all do.” But after all, the reporter didn’t say that the prisoner was freed from jail. Jesus might forgive Berkowitz but Jesus didn’t withdraw the effect of the sin. In order to avoid the painful effect Christians should keep the Law. Another example, a Christian who didn’t show faithfulness to his spouse might break up a marriage. The consequence of his sin is usually distressful. If such a person will repent he will be forgiven. But the union is still broken and the family feels pain. What shall we say? Can we neglect the Law because it brings pain? By no means. God designed the Law as a universal protector from many troubles. “I will never forget your precepts, ... The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes,” (Ps 119:93,95).

\* The Word and the Spirit cry in our ears, **“My children, don’t give the weapons to Satan; don’t give the power to death.”** **“Who keeps my Law,” says the Lord, “will be protected from Satan and his agents.”** Be sure, that guys are watching, they are not sleeping; they are hunting for Christians. “His eyes look for some unfortunate victim. He lies in ambush in a hidden place, like a lion in a thicket; he lies in ambush, waiting to catch the oppressed; he catches the oppressed by pulling in his net,” (Psa 10:8,9). We should be watchful as they are watchful.

**Remember, the unbroken Law is your power! The broken Law is their power!** Jesus will forgive transgressions due to our confessions and faith but Jesus will not set us free from troubles, even if we committed them occasionally.

\* Now let's see how to discern and avoid the second foolish thing. Three Gospels, (Matt. 21:12; Mark 11:15; John 2:15) say that Jesus cleansed the Temple. According to the Gospels, Jesus cleansed the Temple twice. The first time it happened was in the beginning of his ministry, just after the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The second time Jesus cleansed the temple was at the very end of his ministry. In both events Jesus appears as an Executor, his act of justice represent the eschatological Judgment that will begin at the house of God. Now, try to imagine yourselves as eyewitnesses, or even as participants of that very moment -- Jesus cleansing the Temple. In the courtyard, behind Jesus, you see the disciples. While Jesus throws off his outer cloth, unfastens the cord that served as a girdle about his waist and with eyes flashing wrath, strides down the steps, you and the disciples are amazed and wonder at such behavior. You see the respectable Jews, they are going to the inner courtyard. Some do not even deign to notice this unpleasant incident. Others look at him, half in pity, half wondering, asking, "Why do the authorities tolerate such a 'playful' act?" Down below among the market folk confusion reigns, as well it may. The old vegetable woman protests loudly against this interference with her rights, while a crippled man takes keen delight in her nervousness. You see the overthrown tables, spilling scales and coins on the floor. Sheep and oxen are milling around. At the disciples' sign this may seem somewhat inadequate. But what are you thinking?

\* Now, the next imagery. A new pastor who recently arrived to certain church, takes his jacket off and starts cleaning the sanctuary. He throws in the garbage some old and dirty chairs, overturns the table with postcards where people about to bring their donations in exchange. He cleans a pews from some belongings the people like to keep; and he does many other cleaning actions. What's your reaction? Generally speaking, there are a few. "How can you dare! Pa-stor!!!" Or "Pastor, you're right." On the one hand, you are all in agreement with Jesus when he cleansed the Temple, on the other hand, you might not agree with a pastor who dared to clean the church. Think about that.

\* Our reading from (1Cor. 1:22-25) mentions Jews and Greeks who found no joy in God's reaching mercy. Because Jews considered the Good News of Jesus Christ to be foolish, they thought the Messiah would be a conquering king accompanied by signs and miracles. Jesus had not restored David's throne as they expected. Besides, he was executed as a criminal on the cross, that was the great challenge for them. Greeks, too, considered the Good News foolish: They didn't believe in a bodily resurrection; they didn't see in Jesus the powerful characteristics of their mythological gods, and they thought no reputable person would be crucified. What to say? First, the history of Christianity and, second, our own experiences of the Living God in Christ Jesus, prove that it is foolishness to reject Christ's Cross as the power over our sinful flesh, Satan and his agents. Greek's gods are no more worshiped. In the same manner we can say about the Jewish Temple and its sacrificial system, they do not exist anymore. Think about that,

\* In fact, God's rich mercy that we found in the Decalogue, in cleansing of the Temple, and in 'Christ crucified,' still remains hidden for the majority in the world. Some of them might be never understood and believed; but some need to hear in order to believe. Contrary to this fact we've understood and experienced God's rich mercy in Christ Jesus in many ways. Thanks the Word and the Spirit for unveiling our hearts and minds to believe in Gospel so that

believing we might have the eternal life. Knowing Christ personally is the greatest wisdom anyone can have.

Amen.