

March 11, 2012
3rd Sunday of Lent

Brothers and sisters, Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. 1 Cor. 13-25

The Gospel tells us, "Jesus went up to Jerusalem..." To go up to Jerusalem is to go where the cross awaits.

And the powerful second reading, quoted above, tells us that God's ways are not our ways.

The way of the world is to acquire trophies. Super Bowl trophies, golf trophies, trophies, trophies wives! But next year there is a new champ. This year, Tiger loses his claws, and every year despite Botox, trophy wives wrinkle eventually.

And the trophy of Christians—the cross!

During Lent, we go through the desert on our own way to Jerusalem, and in many parishes the powerful Lenten hymn: *Jerusalem My Destiny*.

Before the cross is carried, today, in the Gospel, Jesus cleanses the temple. It will always need cleansing. If we equate the "temple" with our Catholic Church, we know that it needs it too. But Jesus does not destroy the temple. The Romans will do that.

Nor should we expect our church to fall into complete ruins although there are historical periods when it seems this is precisely what may happen. We will always have a messy Church filled with messy people. For none of us individually is a perfect temple, even when the Holy Spirit puts up with us and continues to dwell within us.

So to reform the Church, the reform must start with you and me. Let Lent be a time to sweep out the debris of sinfulness, addiction, and grandiosity.

Like Simon of Cyrene, we will all be asked not only to be with Jesus as he cleanses the temple, but to walk with him as he carries his cross.

And the cross never makes any sense in a purely human fashion. It is a sign of contradiction, unless we see it as God sees it: as an instrument of love that schools us in compassion.

Bill Moyers carried on some famous interviews with Joseph Campbell the famous anthropologist who wrote so powerfully of the power of myths.

In his youth, Campbell was raised Catholic, and have you ever noticed that even among many who “have left the church of their youth,” a Catholic “flavor” remains. Campbell seems to have retained the Catholic insight that the cross is close to resurrection. He once wrote:

“The dark night of the soul
Comes just before revelation.

When everything is lost,
And all seems darkness,
Then comes the new life
And all that is needed...”

He elaborated on that with these words: *“Whatever your fate is, whatever the hell happens, you say, ‘This is what I need.’ It may look like a wreck, but go at it as though it were an opportunity, a challenge. If you bring love to the moment—not discouragement—you will find the strength is there. Any disaster you can survive is an improvement to your character, your stature, and your life...then looking back at your life, you will see that the moments which seemed to be great failures followed by wreckage, were the incidents that shaped your life now.”*

We might dare translate his words in Christian terms: “Your crosses will ultimately be your trophies.” To accept that demands faith, hope, and love. Having cleansed our Lenten temple, we can adorn it with those and make a temple for the glory of the cross.”