

THE TEMPLE CLEANSING & THE RED CARPET REFLECTION OF POPE FRANCIS

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – 7 MARCH 2021



Expulsion of the merchants from the temple | A.N. Mironov | Creative Commons 4.0

POPE FRANCIS & THE SHARING OF SURVIVORS STORIES

As Pope Francis continues his journey in Iraq, the first visit by a Pope to Iraq in history, we are confronted with stories that survivors share, of

- The massive destruction of their towns, churches, schools, medical facilities and businesses, by ISIS
- The long term and on-going persecution by Al Qaeda and its subsidiaries
- The victimization of them by different militia, stealing their homes and contents.

Pope Francis is accompanied by 74 journalists, from 15 countries.

In addition, there are Iraqi media and world media already present in the country.

Pope Francis brings world attention to the many challenges facing Iraq.

Let us listen to his words as he addressed authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps in Baghdad on Friday.

“And God listens, he always listens!

It is up to us to listen to him and to walk in his ways.

May the clash of arms be silenced!

May their spread be curbed, here and everywhere!

May partisan interests cease, those outside interests uninterested in the local population.

May the voice of builders and peacemakers find a hearing!

The voice of the humble, the poor, the ordinary men and women who want to live, work and pray in peace.

May there be an end to acts of violence and extremism, factions and intolerance!

May room be made for all those citizens who seek to cooperate

*in building up this country through dialogue
and through frank, sincere and constructive discussion.*

*Citizens committed to reconciliation and prepared, for the common good,
to set aside their own interests.*

... May no one be considered a second-class citizen."

Apostolic Journey to the Republic of Iraq: Meeting with Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps

We are invited to underline or highlight the words that speak to us from the Pope's quotation above.

And we pause to pray about those words or phrases that speak to each of us.

[pause and pray]

Today's Gospel contains challenges for us today about the way we live our lives.

- *What does today's Gospel reveal, when Christians continue to be persecuted?*
- *What does the contrast between the Marriage Feast of Cana and the Cleansing of the Temple reveal to us?*
- *How do we recognize the divine presence of Jesus in our lives?*
- *Why can't the Cleansing of the Temple be used as an excuse for violence?*
- *How are we called to love?*

JESUS CLEANSING THE TEMPLE & THE WEDDING FEAST OF CANA

This episode grabs our attention.

It seems so different from our image of Jesus as healer.

*'In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves,
and the money-changers seated at their tables.*

*Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple,
both the sheep and the cattle.*

He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

He told those who were selling the doves,

'Take these things out of here!

Stop making my Father's house a market-place!

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the cleansing is placed much later in the Gospel. It is a key passage, for those authorities wishing to find a reason to condemn Jesus.

However, later in John's Gospel, those authorities wishing to find a reason to condemn Jesus, use the episode of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

The raising of Lazarus is a threat to them.

So John moves the Cleansing of the Temple forward to an earlier section.

And places it after the Wedding Feast of Cana, the first miracle.

Cana and the Temple Cleansing are both in Chapter Two.

The Temple Cleansing is now in contrast to *the Wedding Feast of Cana*.

We read Mary's response at the wedding feast at Cana and contrast it with the response of the Authorities in the Temple. Mary is confident in Jesus. She has faith in him. She tells the stewards to do as Jesus says.

However, the Jewish authorities do not have faith in Jesus. They don't truly listen. They misunderstand Jesus and think about the whole temple building. The authorities miss the point. And they do not come to a deeper understanding of the divine presence of Jesus in their lives.

In contrasting the responses of Mary and the authorities, when do we respond like Mary? And when do we find ourselves responding like the authorities?

[pause and reflect]

We contrast Jesus emptying of the Temple and the filling the stone jars and water turning into the best wine at the Wedding Feast in Cana.

TEMPLE CLEANSING –

How do we empty ourselves of what is contrary to God within us?

WEDDING FEAST OF CANA –

How do we prepare ourselves to receive the miracles of God's deepening love with us?

How are we a temple of God's love?

How is God divinely present within us?

[pause and reflect]

DIVINE PRESENCE

John's Gospel develops our understanding of the presence of Jesus, of the dwelling of Jesus.

The revelation of Jesus in the Temple is a part of the unfolding revelation of who Jesus really is. Jesus is the inner sanctuary.

Previously in Chapter 1, John the Baptist witnesses to Jesus as the Lamb of God.

The recognition of the divine presence of Jesus is central to the Pope's visit to Iraq. The recognition of the divine presence of Jesus is central to the way we live our faith. The recognition of the divine presence of Jesus is central to our understanding

- of liturgy,
- of reparation,
- of atonement,
- of reconciliation,
- of identity,
- of our offering praise to God,
- of expressing gratitude to God,
- of the ongoing Covenant of love between God and humanity.

Over three years of public ministry, Jesus reveals that he is

- the sacrificial Lamb and the divine presence of the Sanctuary.
- the new temple.
- divinely present.
- Our Saviour and Redeemer.

LOVE, NOT VIOLENCE

Nowhere in this passage does it say that is alright for us to be violent.

We note that Jesus cleanses, it is not the disciples cleansing.

Nowhere does it say here for disciples to conduct violent crusades and bloodthirsty inquisitions.

Nowhere does it say for disciples to impose their particular culture by conquest.

Yet there is passion and energy and zeal in Jesus.

And as the Gospel chapters develop we see the **zeal and energy and passion of love**.

It is the zeal and passion and energy to love God and to love our neighbour.

Again, we think of Mary at Cana, trusting in Jesus,

and allowing the stewards to do as Jesus says.

The wedding banquet is where the good wine is served.

John's Gospel highlights the love of God.

The Cleansing of the Temple is not a stand-alone passage.

It is not to be misquoted and manipulated.

It is read and prayed in the context of Chapter Two and in the context of the whole Gospel.

THE CARPET IMAGE OF POPE FRANCIS

On Friday at the Syro-Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad, Pope Francis presented an image of a carpet. We are invited to listen.

May these words of wisdom inspire us as well.

"Here I think of the familiar image of a carpet.

The different Churches present in Iraq, each with its age-old historical, liturgical and spiritual patrimony, are like so many individual coloured threads that, woven together, make up a single beautiful carpet,

one that displays not only our fraternity but points also to its source.

For God himself is the artist who imagined this carpet,

patiently wove it and carefully mends it,

desiring us ever to remain closely knit as his sons and daughters..."

"... At times, misunderstandings can arise and we can experience certain tensions; these are the knots that hinder the weaving of fraternity.

They are knots we carry within ourselves; after all, we are all sinners.

Yet these knots can be untied by grace, by a greater love;

they can be loosened by the medicine of forgiveness and by fraternal dialogue, by patiently bearing one another's burdens (cf. Gal 6:2)

and strengthening each other in moments of trial and difficulty."

[Apostolic Journey to the Republic of Iraq: Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Religious, Consecrated Persons, Seminarians, Catechists](#)

As a carpet of God's design,
let us celebrate the *'many individual coloured threads that, woven together, make up a single beautiful carpet,'* and untie by grace, forgiveness and dialogue,
'the knots that hinder the weaving of fraternity'.

Let us pray the [Novena Prayer](#) for the visit of Pope Francis to Iraq.

Fr Gerry

readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/030721.cfm>