

Father Philip Neri Lastimoso, O. Cist.  
Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey  
3rd Sunday of Lent – Year B  
March 11th, 2012  
Gospel: John 2: 13-25

Have you not heard the story of the Madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the marketplace, and cried out incessantly: “I seek God! I seek God!” Many who did not believe in God were standing there, and they laughed.

The Madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Where is God?” he cried. “I will tell you. We have killed Him – you and I. All of us are His murderers. But how did we do this? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is the earth moving now without the sun? Where are we moving now without the sun? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, forward, in all directions? God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

How shall we comfort ourselves, we the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? Here the Madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment.<sup>1</sup>

There are several similarities between “The Story of the Madman” and today’s Gospel. First, they have similar settings. The Madman spoke in the marketplace. While Jesus spoke in the Temple, which the money changers were treating like a marketplace. Second, the two stories have similar main characters. As its title denotes, the Story of the Madman is about a madman. While Jesus’ actions today reveal Him to be a mad man as well. Mad because He is angry. And from the perspective the money changers, He might have been crazy as well. Third, the two main characters preach similar messages. The Madman proclaims the death of God. And Jesus, who is God made man, predicts His own death at the Crucifixion.

The atheist philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, wrote “The Story of the Madman” 130 years ago. He wrote it in order to point out that Christianity was dead, that Christianity was worthless, that secularism and nihilism had taken over this world. And it is here that we see the

---

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, paragraph 125.

stories diverge. While “The Story of the Madman” ends on a note of fear and hopelessness, today’s Gospel doesn’t. The story of the Cleansing of the Temple ends with Christ’s prophecy of the Resurrection. In contrast to “The Story of the Madman,” Saint John wrote His Gospel so that we may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. And that through this belief, we may have life in His name. (cf. John 20:31)

According to Nietzsche, there is death and nothing else. God is dead, and that is it. Death gets the final word. However, according Saint John, from death comes life. That God conquers death. That God conquers even His own death. So that we too may have life.

In today’s first reading from the Book of Exodus, we heard the Ten Commandments. The First Commandment, of course, is that the Lord God is our God, our only God, and we shall have no other gods besides Him. The First Commandment tells us that God must be first in our lives. I believe both “The Story of the Madman” and the Cleansing of the Temple can teach us lessons on how to place God first in our lives.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus clears the merchants and the moneychangers out of the Temple. For us to offer proper praise to God, for us to place God first in our lives, we must do the same. We must clear out all worldly things from the Temples of our bodies, when we enter this new temple of Jesus Christ. When we come to Church each week or each day, we need to flip the tables of our hearts. When we come to Mass, we need to make a whip out of chords and drive out all secular thoughts from our minds.

Ask yourselves how often you get distracted during Mass, how often you let your mind stray to worldly things. I know that for myself I have ruined many good opportunities for prayer and worship by worrying about all the things I need to do after Mass, all the things I need to get done later in the day and later in the week.

During this time of Lent, during this Mass today, we need to purify our minds and put aside all the little things that break our concentration. We need to place all our worldly concerns at the foot of the cross, at the base of the altar. And tell God that He is first in our lives. And trust that God will take care of all our burdens later on in the day, later on in the week, later on after Mass.

But while we need to purify our sacred space and our sacred time from secular concerns, we cannot let the reverse happen. We cannot let our sacred concerns be separated from the secular world. This is the lesson we learn from “The Story of the Madman.” If we completely separate our sacred beliefs from what is going on in the secular world out there, then what the Madman preached becomes true. If we ignore our faith after we walk out of those Church doors, Christianity will die. Christianity will no longer be relevant, just like Nietzsche suggested.

We must put God first in our lives both inside and outside of Church. When we leave these Church walls, we must be prophets to our friends and family members. We must speak out against the evils of our secular world. We must run into the marketplace and cry out incessantly, “I seek God. I seek God.” And unlike the Madman, we need to say it sincerely and authentically. We need to infiltrate the secular world with Christian values. We need to do this now in order to build a civilization of love. We must do this today in order to create a culture of life. We must do this. Otherwise, the culture of death will reign supreme. Death will get the final word.

But on a practical note, how are we to do this? How are we to re-evangelize the secular world? Pope Benedict XVI offers us some simple, straightforward advice that we can use as our first step. In this year’s Lenten message, Pope Benedict speaks about the idea of fraternal correction. With this practice, we gently remind those around us of the standards of our faith.

And we compassionately point out to them when their lives do not live up to these high standards. This is something we do in the monastery. And while it is a bit unpleasant, I am eternally grateful for all the times that my monastic brothers have pointed out how my actions do not line up with the truths of the faith. I will leave you all with a quote from the Pope's Lenten message:

Christ himself commands us to admonish a brother who is committing a sin. We must not remain silent before evil. I am thinking of all those Christians who, out of human regard or purely personal convenience, adapt to the prevailing mentality, rather than warning their brothers and sisters against ways of thinking and acting that are contrary to the truth and that do not follow the path of goodness. Christian admonishment is never motivated by a spirit of accusation or recrimination. It is always moved by love and mercy. In a world pervaded by individualism, it is essential to rediscover the importance of fraternal correction, so that together we may journey towards holiness. All of us are weak and imperfect. It is a great service, then, to help others and allow them to help us, so that we can be open to the whole truth about ourselves, improve our lives and walk more uprightly in the Lord's ways. There will always be a need for a gaze which loves and admonishes, which knows and understands, which discerns and forgives, as God has done and continues to do with each of us.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2012, paragraph 5.