



## THIRD WEEK OF LENT

### Third Sunday of Lent – 7 March 2021



*Cecco del Caravaggio, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

In our gospel today we have John's account of the clearing of the Jerusalem Temple. This occurs very early in John, in fact just after the working of the first miracle of Cana: turning the water into the most amazing wine of the very best vintage. We see that Jesus wants to transform and change; the miracle points to a new age of transformation and plenty—a sign that the Messiah has truly come into the world. Jesus and his companions move from party spirit into pilgrimage spirit as they make their Camino to the Jerusalem Temple, the centre of Jewish faith and worship. John places this incident early in the ministry of Jesus, while the other three gospels use this dramatic event to mark the start of Holy Week.

Even today, I am always deeply moved as I stand in prayer and solidarity at the great Western Wall in Jerusalem, also known as the 'Wailing Wall'. It is the only surviving section of the wall which, in ancient times, formed a part of the enclosure of Herod's temple near the Holy of Holies, and at which Jews traditionally gather for prayer and religious lament. For Muslims, this is the Buraq wall, marking the boundary of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, sacred in Islam as the place where the Prophet left earth to ascend to heaven. In this space, you are very aware of three of the great religious traditions of the world, and standing before its

might, you realise just how small you actually are. Praying before that wall, I realise that there is something much greater in life, and that wars, disputes and violence in the name of religion are meaningless and do not serve to honour or worship God.



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The cleansing of the Temple by Jesus could be seen as an act of violence; some see it as an indication of the humanity of Jesus—he actually lost his temper. Others present it as righteous indignation—this holiest of holy places was just like a noisy market; Jesus wanted people to show respect. Political unrest and the problems of Roman occupation meant that the Temple precincts had to house the cattle market which was normally outside in the Kidron Valley—animals and birds were used in the Temple sacrifice rituals. Money changers were needed as it would have been against Jewish law to pay the Temple Tax with Roman coins that had a picture of the emperor on. At Cana, Jesus is ushering in a new Messianic age of plenty; in his actions here in the Temple, he shows that there will now be no need for sacrifice and **‘there will be no more traders in the Temple of Yahweh’** (Zech 14:21). What is very clear from John’s account is that Jesus identifies himself with his Father, as he cries against the stallholders: **‘Take all this out of here and stop turning MY Father’s house into a market’** (Jn 2: 17). John shows that Jesus has **‘zeal’**, which is more than mere ‘enthusiasm’; the love of the whole Trinity is a passion that drives Jesus to such uncharacteristic behaviour. It is that love that led people like Nano Nagle and John Bosco to start new and exciting movements in the Church; to found religious families that still make an impact today.

This identification with ‘my Father’ leads to a discussion with the Jews as to why Jesus could do such a thing—no doubt there were fears that he was being blasphemous, as they demanded justification for this action. Jesus offers them a clear and unambiguous sign: **‘destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up’** (Jn 2:19). The dialogue from his detractors takes on a sneering tone, as they scornfully point out that Jesus could never rebuild the Temple in just three days—it would be physically impossible. Jesus is, of course, referring to himself, and John is offering a ‘spoiler alert’ right at the start of his gospel; Jesus will become the victim of a much greater violence than the throwing over of a few tables and chairs; he will become the ultimate sacrificial victim on Calvary, making Temple sacrifice unnecessary. The total love of God offers us hope to all of us through this darkness of passion and death, when Resurrection comes three days later.

This time of Lent is offering us a chance to reflect on our own personal zeal: has our 'giving up' or 'doing more' made an impact in our lives? We might have lost some weight now that the biscuit tin is under lock and key, but have we become better people? Are we moved by the injustices, violence, hatred and war that we can see daily? Do the cries of the poor and abused reach our ears? Are we prepared to speak out, decry the unfairness, or just let it continue? Do we become complicit in the obvious badness and say or do nothing? We might not want to speak an evil, but do we also choose to refuse to hear about evil and to refuse to see it also?



*Photo: Robert Fotograf on Pixabay*

The gospel still needs to be preached this week; each of us need to hear today's gospel and share that same sense of zeal and dedication. I pray that the Lord gives your fire in the belly to really fight for something you believe in; you have the power to change and transform the world today; you can make a difference in the lives of family and friends. As always, we remember that the incarnation of Jesus demands that we, as his true followers, cannot sit on the side-lines; we have to do our bit to transform our world. We still have enough time to make new resolutions for Lent and be the change we want to see in our world. Michael Winstanley reminds us:

**The image of the risen body of Jesus as our temple takes us to the heart of John's gospel message. Jesus, the Word enfleshed and glorified, is the focal point of God's presence with us ... Lent invites us to reflect on what God does for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and to ponder who we are in our union with Jesus, the new temple. Lent is a time for truly being.** ('Lenten Sundays' p. 97)

**Today:** reflect on your Lenten resolutions: are they really working for you? If not, are you brave enough to change them?

**We can pray:** Heavenly Father help me pay close attention to myself so that I can grow as a person. I pray that I persevere in all things, especially in spreading Your gospel with motivation and determination. I pray that I do not become discouraged by problems and issues of life; instead, help me push through the trials and tribulations that I must face in Jesus Name, Amen.

**Watch:** The Temple cleansing from the movie , 'Jesus of Nazareth' which adopts the synoptic gospels' perspective, placing the event at the start of Holy Week:

<https://youtu.be/hn-6IE9ERW4>

**Monday 8 March 2021**



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via Wikimedia Commons*

***The feast of St John of God, a Portuguese saint famed for his care of the poor and especially the sick. He founded the Order of Hospitallers who are noted for their medical concern; today we could remember all those amazing medics working through the pandemic to bring us hope and light.***

In Luke's Gospel today, we see Jesus going home: he is among those very people he played with as a child on the hills around Nazareth; he is with those who probably ordered tables and chairs from the carpentry shop of his father, Joseph. He is well known, and it is precisely because he is so familiar that the people cannot accept his words of healing and calm. Jesus is preaching a gospel of total inclusion that 'enraged' those in the synagogue; their anger spilled out into wanting to do him physical harm by throwing him off the local cliff—Jesus realised very strongly that 'no prophet is ever accepted in his own country'!

There is an old saying that tells us 'familiarity breeds contempt'. It is so easy to pick on the ones we know so well; we can verbally bully and abuse, and if we are not challenged, that verbal taunting can lead to physical harm. This is why it is essential that the Church call out bullying, no matter how powerful the source. John of God followed in the tradition of the healing ministry of Jesus. More than ever, in these divided times, we need to promote the balm of patience, understanding and care. We need to stand up for those in ICU wards and on ventilators—they, literally, do not have a voice. Yet, we still see people, perhaps among our own friends, who tell us that Covid-19 is no more than a flu. They promote all kinds of reckless conspiracy theories that show a deep disdain and lack of respect for the victims and for those caring for them. Wear your mask, observe physical distancing and make sure you wash your hands frequently and thoroughly—people know more about you through your iPhone and social media than they possibly can through any vaccine.

Please do what you can to stop the spread and listen to our modern prophets; stop other viruses too, like the virus of racism, the virus of entitlement, the virus of exceptionalism. Pope Francis watched the Epiphany Day riot in horror, as we all did: a global beacon of democracy was severely compromised by those claiming to be 'patriots', while leaving five

dead. In his interview with Mediaset's Canale 5 TV channel in Italy, the Holy Father held nothing back; we all have our political standpoint, but the storming of the Capitol was totally unacceptable and would not meet the standards of loyal opposition:

**In the most mature reality, there is always something that doesn't work, people who take a path against the community, against democracy and against the common good. Thank God this exploded into the open so it can be seen, so it can be remedied. This must be condemned, this movement, regardless of the people involved.**

*Mediaset Canale 5 interview with Pope Francis, 10/01/2021*

**Today:** use your words to encourage and build up your family and friends—words do matter.

**We can pray:** Catholics, we need to do better. Priests and deacons, if you did not speak about radical justice, love and peace from the pulpit; if you did not guide your flock toward building a more just world with a full range of life issues, take responsibility now and find courage. Your ability to serve in this way is a privilege that women who dare to speak out will never have. Please do not waste it ... I am struck by the span of Jesus' arms. Jesus' arms reached that far—to all of us. The arm span is bloody, but it conquered the darkness, not with an attack but with boundless love ... I am still asking what it means to love as Christ loves. Love means something more in the face of this moment, this woundedness, polarization and violence. I still do not know how to hold this moment. But I know who is holding us.

*Prayer written by Tinamarie Stolz, Chaplain at St Joseph's University, Philadelphia for 'America Magazine' 09/01/2021, in response to the Capitol Hill insurgency*



**Tuesday 9 March 2021**

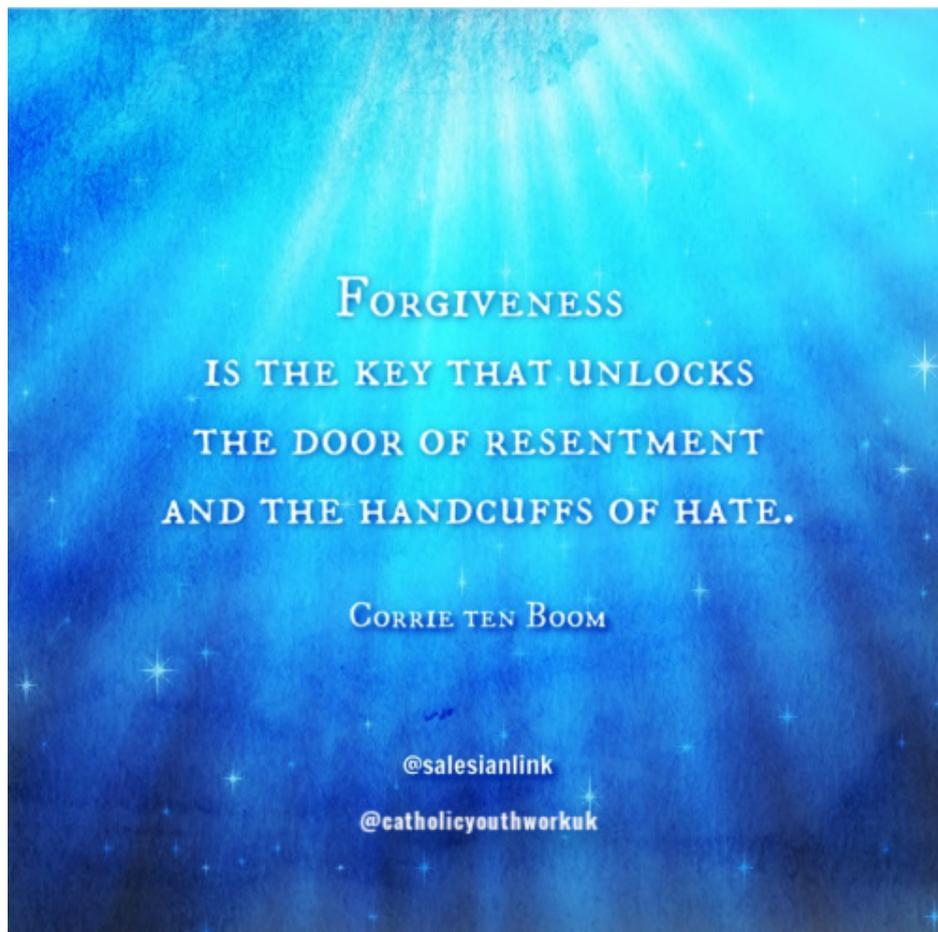


*St Frances of Rome Giving Alms, Giovanni Battista Gaulli, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

***Today we remember St Francis of Rome. Born in the fourteenth century, she was a lay follower of St Benedict; she was married and was a mother, losing two children to the plagues that were all too common in the great city of Rome at this time. As we endure this modern plague, perhaps we could pray with her for those mothers, all across the planet, who have lost children to the pandemic.***

In the media today, journalists like to ask the so-called 'gotcha' question—a question that will unnerve their interviewee and catch them out. It is a way to ridicule and belittle and should play no part in professional and newsworthy interviews. In some ways, this is what Peter is asking of Jesus today: he wants to show that he has understood the notion of forgiveness, and questions if he should forgive the brother who has wronged him **'as often as seven times seven?'** However, as we have seen with the scribes and pharisees, Jesus is well able for any 'gotcha' question, no matter how far out of left field it comes. Jesus speaks of forgiving **'seventy-seven times'**. Now, before this turn into a maths lesson, we must realise that Jesus is talking about unconditional forgiveness—something that a lot of us find exceptionally difficult. When we have been wronged, when our name and reputation have been trashed, when we have been thrown under the bus by the very people we trusted and admired, somehow forgiveness does not come easy. We soon come to realise that forgiveness is a gift from God; our forgiveness does not depend on anything we have done, but on what Christ has done, for **'By grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God'** (Eph. 2:8).

God has forgiven us so much that we have no reason not to forgive. No amount of hurt should make us forget God's forgiveness or make us retaliate in return. Joseph had every reason to be hurt, as his own brothers sold him into slavery when he was still a teenager. He was wrongly accused by the wife of Potiphar and put in prison. Despite all he suffered, Joseph forgave them all. When his brothers expected him to take his revenge on them after their father's death, they did not know the power of forgiveness. Joseph had forgiven them and told them that he was not in the place of God and that the actions they had meant for evil against him, God had meant for good. He told them that God had used them to save many people during the time of famine. Forgiveness allows God to turn around what people have meant for evil into something good. Who do we need to forgive today?



**Today:** reach out to someone who really needs your forgiveness; if you find that too hard, then please pray for them.

**We can pray:** The mark of Cain is stamped upon our foreheads. Across the centuries, our brother Abel was slain in blood which we drew and shed tears we caused by forgetting Thy love. Forgive us, Lord, for the curse we falsely attributed to their name as Jews. Forgive us for crucifying Thee a second time in their flesh. For we knew not what we did.

(The prayer of St Pope John XXIII begging for forgiveness from the Jewish people for the Church's sin of antisemitism.)

**Wednesday 10 March 2021**



***Today is a day of celebration in Scotland as we remember St John Ogilvie; he was born into a protestant home but became a Catholic while studying in Belgium. He went on to become a Jesuit priest at the height of the reformation hatred; he was arrested in Glasgow and executed. Tradition has it that he threw his rosary into the crowd and it was caught by man who then converted to Catholicism. We remember the Church in Scotland today.***

Matthew, the evangelist who writes especially for the Jewish people, is keen to present Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish law and prophecy—he is the long-expected messiah; God's full and total glory is seen in him and his works. Thus, as the Jewish scholar Amy Jill Levine points out, Jesus is not a revolutionary who is going to get rid of Jewish teaching and replace it with his own! Jesus clearly states that he will not abolish Jewish law and prophecy, rather 'I have come to complete them'. Law is there for the good of society; the prophets preached so that society can be made better. In his words and actions, Jesus might be seen to challenge the law, but never change it; as a prophet Jesus is called to ask those awkward questions: why are you more concerned about the type of vestments you wear at prayer? Why do you act like hypocrites? Why do you condemn others? Those questions are addressed equally to us today; we can feel safe in the fact that we have been to mass, abstained from meat on a Friday or attended my prayer group. However, are we just looking at the superficial? Is an hour in church or online on a Sunday going to transform my life? Surely, I have to do more than just follow a law that mandates my presence at mass on a Sunday.

We are invited to be more than 'Sunday Catholics' our faith and following the law of Christ must lead to the world being a better place—the law demands action. At the end of the mass, the deacon tells us plainly, 'go in peace to love and serve the Lord!'; in other words: make those words and actions of the mass mean something.

You can be the difference that somebody desperately needs today. You might not be able to change the whole world, but your words and actions will change the world of your family, friends and those you meet today.

**Today:** love and serve the Lord!

**We can pray:** God of All Things New, I believe that through You, I can achieve change in my life because You are doing a new thing! Now it springs up; I pray that I perceive it, I pray that

I acknowledge that You are the source of my change. Thank You, Father, for making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland! Lord, I thank You for the changes that have occurred in my life and the changes that are about to happen, Amen. (based on Isa. 43:19)



### Thursday 11 March 2021

In today's gospel we see Jesus the prophet, showing how the reign of God has come into the lives of people, as he **'resolutely took the road to Jerusalem'** (Lk 9:51). True to the proclamation that he shared in Nazareth, Jesus wants to bring **'liberty to captives'** (Lk 4:18). Jesus meets the man unable to speak and he is cured, but the people are amazed, with some thinking that **'it is through Beelzebul, the prince of devils that he casts out devils.'** They refuse to recognise the goodness of Jesus and accuse him of being evil; we have rightly seen many evil people condemned in society, but what about those condemned on hearsay? What about good and honest people whose lives have been turned upside down by innuendo, rumour and gossip. It was that innuendo, rumour and gossip that led to Calvary and a real manifestation of what evil can do to overpower goodness, Yet even this ultimate blasphemy of crucifixion and horrendous death, could not overpower the goodness of the Christian message.

The man in today's miracle wanted to proclaim a truth that many do not want to hear. In our Church today, we see some very vocal enemies of Pope Francis; sadly, they come from the both the laity and clergy, even from the College of Cardinals who oppose what they see to be a 'liberal' message. The truth is, of course, that Popes are products of their personal histories and do not plop down to earth from 'planet Pope'. There are people in the Church family who were not enamoured by the ministry of Pope St John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI—this is human nature, but **'every kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin'**. I urge you to remember these words the next time you see a Facebook post critical of Pope Francis. He has been given to us, as leader and guide, and his job is made harder by those who constantly compare him unfavourably to previous popes.

Jesus calls for unity today and we can choose to be part of the solution or part of the problem. At the start of the year, the Holy Father urged us all to work for unity in facing the global pandemic; it seems to me that we have far greater priorities in our Church than to spend endless hours feuding over who occupies the Chair of Peter; we have a Pope in Francis and we owe him not only respect, but loyal support in this wonderful Catholic Church that we belong to:

**We don't know what 2021 has in store for us, but what each of us and all of us together can do, is to commit ourselves a little more to take care of each other and of creation, our common home. (**

Pope Francis, New Year Prayer, 03/01/2021

**Today:** pray for Pope Francis—pray for those who support him and those who work against him



*Detail of Mary, Untier of Knots by Johann Georg Melchior Schmidtner (1625-1705)  
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

**We can pray:** Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me. Virgin Mary, Mother of fair love, Mother who never refuses to come to the aid of a child in need, Mother whose hands never cease to serve your beloved children because they are moved by the divine love and immense mercy that exist in your heart, cast your compassionate eyes upon me and see the snarl of knots that exists in my life. You know very well how desperate I am, my pain, and how I am bound by these knots. Mary, Mother to whom God entrusted the undoing of the knots in the lives of his children, I entrust into your hands the ribbon of my life. No one, not even the evil one himself, can take it away from your precious care. In your hands there is no knot that cannot be undone. Powerful Mother, by your grace and intercessory power with Your Son and My Liberator, Jesus, take into your hands today this knot ... [mention a problem you are facing]

I beg you to undo it for the glory of God, once for all. You are my hope. O my Lady, you are the only consolation God gives me, the fortification of my feeble strength, the enrichment of my destitution, and, with Christ, the freedom from my chains. Hear my plea. Keep me, guide me, protect me, o safe refuge! Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me. Amen.

Friday 12 March 2021



*From the [Vincentian Family website](#)*

Today, Jesus is tested by another ‘gotcha’ question; this time it comes from a scribe who wants to know, ‘**which is the first of all the commandments?**’ Jesus obviously repeats the Sh’ma:

**Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad**

**Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is One.** (Deuteronomy 6:4)

Jesus goes on to repeat that central vision of Deuteronomy: love God ‘**with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.**’ When you visit Israel, you become very aware of a little wooden box attached to the door post, especially if you are staying in a strongly Jewish area; this is the ‘mezuzah’ which contains a parchment with the words of the Sh’ma prayer. It is a constant reminder of how the home or, in my case, the hotel room, is blessed by God at all times.

The greatest commandment of Jesus, the one who comes not to change the Law, but to fulfil it, is LOVE GOD. The second is again so simple, ‘love your neighbour AS YOURSELF’. As faithful Catholics we are usually particularly good at observing the first two commandments, but are woefully lacking in love of self, as it smacks of being selfish. However, as the experience of this past year has shown us, we cannot keep pouring from an empty jug. We need time for recreation—a time when we work with God to restore our energy levels and enjoy life. We all need time to relax and enjoy the life we have been given—the danger is that we get so caught up in love of God and neighbour, that we ignore our own wellbeing. Today give yourself time to relax—find your happy space and enjoy it without feeling guilty.

**Today: enjoy special time for yourself, as you pray to the God of love for all those you love. Enjoy a special treat.**

**We can pray:**

### **We can pray:**

Dear God, I come to you asking for your help in keeping me strong and healthy in body, mind and spirit. I thank you that because you created me you know my inner thoughts. You know all of my fears, my hopes and my dreams. You know my past, present and future. Only you know my personality and you know all of my emotional needs. I thank you that you are the source of health in my inner being. When I draw close to your, you add your strength to mine. You help me cope. You guide me. You comfort me. You strengthen me. I pray that you will continue to develop in me the graces that create emotional wellness.

I pray that you will renew my mind daily and keep my thought process clear. Help me guard against negativity, judgementalism and worry. I pray that you will help me handle my emotions well. I thank you that you understand my feelings and that you hurt when I hurt, and you rejoice when I rejoice.

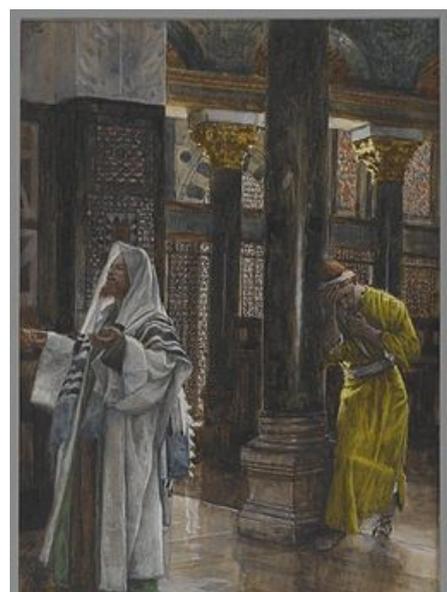
Guide me to use and express my emotions in appropriate and healthy ways. Comfort me when I am hurting. Calm me when I am distressed and anxious. Heal me when I am broken. Alert me when I am overreacting. Prevent me from acting before I think. When I am overcome with negative emotions to the point that they are interfering with my life, guide me to seek help from others.

Show me how to handle stress. Guide me how to keep my life balanced. Open my eyes to activities that can replenish my mind and spirit. Never let my heart grow old. Keep me moving from glory to glory in your Kingdom. Help me care for my body and keep it strong. Help me to eat well and keep fit. Most of all, draw me closer to you. Fill me with faith, trust, love, grace and peace. Let me sit at your feet in your presence, safe and secure in You. Amen.

### **Saturday 13 March 2021**

Luke offers another important parable to reflect on in today's gospel; it is a parable that we can readily identify with—and perhaps even offer names for the two main characters.

The Pharisee represents so many 'churchy' people that we know, especially as depicted in popular media. 'Dot Cotton' on the popular BBC soap opera, 'Eastenders', could quote scripture from memory, but was often seen as scheming and hurtful. The 'Ivy Brennan' character in 'Coronation St' may well have been a mass-going Catholic but was spiteful and mean. The pharisee in the story sees himself as superior to the tax-collector; in his narcissistic ranting, he sees himself as better than the



*James Tissot, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

public sinner beside him in the Temple—he equates goodness with his ability to belittle others, especially this public sinner.

We all know Christians who can see the sins of others, while conveniently forgetting their own major faults. It is far easier to point the finger at others, than to open up our hearts to accept our need for forgiveness. This is exactly what the tax collector does: he sees his faults and failures as he repeats, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner.' He knows his status and it is this man whom Jesus praises for his honesty so that he can go 'home again at rights with God.'

This time of Lent has allowed us to come face to face with our own selves; just as we are called to love ourselves, so we are called to be totally and truthfully honest with ourselves. A good Lent will be one where we can root out some of that selfishness and narrow mindedness. It will be a time to be honest.

**Today:** Take time to reflect on WHO you are. Open your heart to accept the total love of God offered to you today.

**We can watch and pray:** The Deer's Cry <https://youtu.be/GGHWiAGpIPO>



*Photo: Desi Maxwell on Pixabay*

I arise today through the strength of heaven

Light of sun, radiance of moon

Splendour of fire, speed of lightning

Swiftness of wind, depth of the sea

Stability of earth, firmness of rock

I arise today through God's strength to pilot me

God's eye to look before me

God's wisdom to guide me

God's way to lie before me

God's shield to protect me

From all who shall wish me ill

Afar and a-near

Alone and in a multitude

Against every cruel, merciless power

That may oppose my body and soul

Christ with me, Christ before me

Christ behind me, Christ in me

Christ beneath me, Christ above me

Christ on my right, Christ on my left

Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down

Christ when I arise, Christ to shield me

Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me

Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me

I arise today.

(adapted from the 'Breastplate of St Patrick' by Sean Davey)

## For children

### Jesus Cleanses the Temple

John 2:13-17 (NIV)



Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers in the \_\_\_\_\_.

LTABE

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TATCEL

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### Bible Memory Verse

"Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

John 2:16 (NIV)

### ANSWERS

table

cattle

money

whip

temple

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*From qumran2.net*

Say a prayer for Pope Francis