

MAY 29, 2026 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

There are certain crime stories on TV, and at the beginning of each one of them you will hear these words: “Because of mature content and graphic violence, viewer discretion is advised.” Shows like NCIS, FBI, and Law and Order often begin this way. We could very well say the same thing of our Gospel today because of mature content and scenes of graphic violence, viewer discretion is advised.

Mark uses a technique where he starts a story, part one then tells a narrative, and then ends with part two. The first story, the middle story, is the cleansing of the temple. In the Gospel according to John, this cleansing appears right at the beginning, soon after the miracle at Cana in Galilee. Jesus comes to Jerusalem and cleanses the temple, throwing down the gauntlet and declaring, “This is my Father’s house, and this is my plan of action.”

In the Synoptic Gospels, we have just finished Palm Sunday, and it is the next day, Monday or Tuesday, when Jesus comes and cleanses the temple. It is the last straw, and the scribes and Pharisees decide to kill Jesus.

There are many layers to this story. Jesus often came to the temple, teaching in its alcoves and observing the sacrifices. Farmers would sell lambs, goats, sheep, and bulls, animals without blemish, suitable for sacrifice. They could not have broken limbs, marks, or defects. Yet the prophets often criticized the people for offering blemished sacrifices, keeping the best for themselves.

Another layer involves the money changers. Worshippers could not use Roman currency; they had to exchange it for shekels. Even today, in Jerusalem, you will find money changers converting foreign currency. These practices were allowed by the temple authorities, who profited from them. The exchange rates fluctuated, benefiting those in charge.

When Jesus drove these people out of the temple, the religious leaders were not upset because he was wrong, but because their profits were threatened. We can relate to this today, when economic disruptions affect prices, we feel it deeply. The same was true then: touch someone's livelihood, and the reaction is strong.

Jesus cleanses the temple because it is meant to be a sacred place. Even today, we sometimes forget this, speaking loudly in churches and losing a sense of reverence.

Then we return to the fig tree. Jesus, feeling hungry, looks for figs, even though it is not the season. He finds none and curses the tree. This is a metaphor. It is like expecting to find apples in the middle of winter, impossible.

Jesus reminds us that the law is good, but it is only a foundation. As he says in Matthew 5, he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. We do not live on a foundation alone; we live in a house built upon it. From that foundation, we go out to proclaim the Good News.

As Peter says in the first reading, "The end is near." How, then, do we live? Maya Angelou once said that people may not remember what you say, but they will remember how you made them feel. Peter gives us guidance: love intensely, be hospitable, and serve others.

Loving intensely means not just quoting Scripture or giving advice, but making others feel truly cared for. Being hospitable means going beyond directions—walking with others on their journey. And finally, service: Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and we are called to do the same.

In this way, we proclaim the Good News.

God bless you all.