

## A House of Prayer ... for All Peoples

Mark 11:15-19

Lent 4B

March 22 2009

I want to tell you about the first time I visited the Mexican city of Tijuana many years ago. You walk across the border, and immediately find yourself on the main street, Avenida Revolución, the Avenue of the Revolution. However, the 1910 Revolution it honors has been replaced with a different purpose: the Avenida exists to help Americans part with their money as quickly and painlessly as possible.

On the Avenida everything is different from here. They don't have rock & roll, they sing corridos and norteñas. They don't eat burgers and fries, instead beans and tortillas. They don't have George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, they have Moctezuma and Hidalgo. As you walk around there you have to learn the Spanish names for things, or you'll be totally lost. *Ristorante?* (restaurant). *Zapateria!* (shoe store). *Joyeria* (jewelry store). *Farmacia* (pharmacy). *Bodega* (store).

It was a lot of fun walking down the Avenida looking in all of the stores, but it was also very upsetting, because of the dozens of poor children, six or seven years old constantly surrounding me trying to sell me "*chicle*" (chewing gum). Their families are so poor, so desperate, that they put their young children to work on the street. I hate poverty, I hate seeing hungry children, and so I felt a fire burning inside of me: "*This can't go on; something's gotta change!*"

That must've been a prayer, because God answered me. Across the street I saw a banner stretched above a storefront. "*Casa de Cambio*" it read in big red letters, which I was able to translate immediately as "*House of Change*". "*Amen!*" I said to myself, "*someone else feels the way I do!*" So I went over to explore this incredible revelation, obviously a sign from God. But the Casa de Cambio was not at all what I hoped. A Casa de Cambio is not a community center dedicated to social justice, it's not even a place of charity, like a soup kitchen or a clothing closet. A Casa de Cambio is a currency conversion booth, a convenient way to change dollars into pesos, yet another way for streetwise entrepreneurs to squeeze a few more dollars out of the rich tourists.

I was sad, but then I saw that it really was a revelation. God had opened up to me a vision of what my church could be back home – a house of change. "*Casa de Cambio*", a great name for a church! It sounds mysterious, it sounds exotic, it sounds different. Imagine

greeting our guests at the church door on Sunday morning, "*Bienvenido, welcome to the Casa de Cambio, Paz y amistad, peace and friendship.*" "*Casa de Cambio*" - doesn't that sound really cool?

And it fits the Gospel, too. Jesus was all about change. That's why he went to the Temple in Jerusalem that day. But when he got there the place was jammed with money changers, who took terrible advantage of poor people visiting the temple. Here's how: when you visit the Temple you make an offering, but it has to be one of the coins of Israel. No other kind of coin is allowed, so the money changers were there to convert coins from Egypt and Rome and Babylon to the coins of Israel, at high interest. Then the high priest of the temple got a big kickback from the money changers. Today, we'd call it an executive bonus! Jesus was so upset at the way that those money changers took advantage of the poor that he overturned their tables and chased them out of the Temple. He was really mad, because the Temple was the house of God, but money changers had made it into a place of greed.

The story of Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers is found in all four of the Gospels. In all of them Jesus declares that the house of God is not be a place of thievery but a "house of prayer". But Mark's version includes something more. Jesus says that the temple of God is meant to be a "*house of prayer ... for all peoples*". In Mark's telling, Jesus is more than a reformer who wants to clean up temple corruption. The change he has in mind is revolutionary, not only to clean up the temple but to transform it, not just for the people of Israel but for the whole world.

That's the kind of Casa de Cambio I pray this church can be, a place not just for ourselves to hide, but to build a better world. As a Casa de Cambio we aren't talking about changing money, we're talking about changing people, and a lot of prayers go into that. People can change, and we are dedicated to helping that change happen. There are lots of things that need changing to build a better world. Have you noticed? What are some of the things people do to hurt one another? Fighting, war, pollution, meanness, greed, discrimination, stealing, name-calling ... we're here to change them all, one new friend at a time.