

NEVER TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ANYONE/ANY SITUATION

One of the great Television Series I enjoy watching is **UNDERCOVER BOSS**. Undercover Boss is an American reality television series which started on February 7, 2010, and produced by Studio Lambert. Each episode of this reality television series showcases a person in a higher management position of a major business, going undercover as an entry-level employee to discover all the goings on in their company. One of the episodes that captivated me was that of T&T Supermarket in Canada which I watched in 2015. When the boss of T&T – Tina Lee, wanted to expand her Asian Supermarket brand, she went undercover to experience what was happening with her chain supermarket. From her firsthand experience, she was able to report to the Board of Directors what must be done about their stores, improve employees' development, upgrade their products and services as well as reward the staff who worked hard while she was undercover. I remember watching the feedback part and shedding tears at the humanity therein. The Boss, Tina Lee, was so wonderful and captured what every organisation should stand for. The other side of Undercover Boss is that those managers and staff who were busy doing their own thing, taking advantage of others under them or taking advantage of the organisation were disciplined and some of them were dismissed to avoid a repeat of that in the future. In all our readings this Sunday, we are reminded of the need never to take advantage of anyone and/or any situation.

In today's Gospel pericope from John Chapter 2, we are presented with the Holy Season of Passover which some Jewish people took advantage of to enrich themselves thereby pushing God to the margins. According to our Gospel, as the Jewish Passover was drawing near, Jesus went up to the Temple in Jerusalem. Recall that the Temple was the most important institution and building in Jewish life. It was the place where God dwelt among His people in a special manner. The Temple was God's house, built under the guidance and instructions of God Himself and furnished exquisitely with gold, silver and expensive stones. To round it up, the Temple was under the care of the High Priest and the priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem. However, something was happening in Jerusalem – The Jewish Feast of Passover, which was a Pilgrimage Feast. As such, there were lots of pilgrims from various parts of the world in Jerusalem to observe the feast. Since each of them came with their own currency which carried the image of their emperors and not suitable to be used in paying the Temple Tax and buying of sacrificial animals, there was need for them to exchange their currencies to that acceptable in the Temple. Unfortunately, instead of doing this outside the precincts of the Temple, the traders were allowed to do that inside the Temple. To make matters worse, since the pilgrims had no other options available to them, the traders became extortioners as they took advantage of the situation to rip-off the pilgrims and increase their profit margins. In His Active Aggression, Jesus made a whip, drove them out of the Temple, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and shouted at them. Although the actions of Jesus would seem strange to us today, in fact, I would not

encourage anyone to do the same to avoid triggering lots of Safeguarding Alerts and even a jail term; however, it is clear where Jesus was coming from – **A place of Love.**

It is this Love that we are presented with in today's First Reading from Exodus Chapter 20 about the Decalogue; Jesus summarised it to be the Love of God and Love of our Neighbour. Yes, if we truly love God, we will not take advantage of Him and His Church; if we truly love our neighbours, we will not take advantage of them nor manipulate them for our own gains.

My friends, the question we must ask ourselves today is – **Do we take advantage of anyone or any situation for our own benefit?** Regarding God, is it possible that currently, there are churches, and ministers of God, who use God to take advantage of other people? I am happy I live and minister in a country where religion is regulated and where the Catholic Bishops take seriously their duty of shepherding. It was not too long ago that the Catholic Church was steeped in the scandal of Simony which led to Friar Martin Luther publishing his 95 Theses in 1517. I thought those days were behind us; apparently not. On 1st March, I stumbled upon a Facebook Page where a Catholic Priest was asking his congregation to give God huge sums of money if they want to be blessed by God. I simply froze because everything we have is a gift from God and we do not give Him anything to increase our blessings from Him, we give, because we have been blessed by Him. In terms of our relationship with others, do we take advantage of people's good heart and kindness? There was a parish I once ministered here in England, and I met a lady who was heading 8 out of the 12 ministries in that parish. Upon investigation, I discovered that although many of the parishioners were ready to serve; however, the lady was not ready to let go of any ministry. She wanted to remain the centre of attraction in that parish. Another popular thing we encounter in today's world is people taking advantage of other people's vulnerabilities especially in the field of love. We live in a world where so many people want to be partnered with individuals who are financially stable and who would provide for them, and not because they are in love with such individuals. Hence, the one needing financial stability professes fake love to the one with money, to ensure he/she is looked after. We are aware that such fake love does not last. It is important to remember that things are to be used while people are to be loved.

Like Christ, who drove out those taking advantage of the Holy Feast of Passover to enrich themselves at the expense of foreign pilgrims, let us in this Holy Season of Lent, have a total clear-out of all our inclinations towards taking advantage of people and situations, like Tina Lee, in the Undercover Boss.

Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Lent, Year B (03/03/2024)