



Bishop David Oakley

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Letter for the Third Sunday of Lent 2024

3rd March 2024

To my dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

There is something disturbing about today's Gospel. What sense can we make of the Lord's action, making a whip out of some cord, driving sellers out of the Temple and overturning the tables of religious commerce?

I am reminded of that moment when Jesus was an infant. Our Blessed Lady and St Joseph took him up to Jerusalem where he could be presented to the Lord in the Temple there. They offered a sacrifice to God in accordance with the Law, a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons. The Temple in Jerusalem was all about sacrifices to God; sacrifices of thanksgiving for blessings received, holocausts of desire for God's mercy for sins committed. There were various sacrifices for the many feasts celebrated by the children of Israel. The most important one being the sacrifice of a lamb for the Feast of the Passover.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus burned with compassion for all people. He came to establish God's reign, the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is about life within a restored relationship with God after the Fall. Ultimately, Jesus himself would become the sacrificial lamb, the Lamb of God whose blood was poured out for us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world.

Jesus came to heal the sick, cast out demons, restore order to our broken world. This is what Jesus seeks to do today. He invites us to become his workers in the vineyard. We are to break down the walls of prejudice and division. We are to work tirelessly for justice and peace. It is only right that the followers of Jesus should share his Heart, on fire with desire for a better world.

I wonder what it would have been like, to be a disciple of Jesus in the Temple that day. Maybe we would be having second thoughts. Do I really want to be identified with someone who acts in that manner? Do I want to be associated with someone who is so clearly a source of concern to the authorities? How many of us prefer a more quiet life!

And yet we are baptised to make a difference in our world. And the Cross is part of what this difference is all about. Jesus tells us this himself. Unless we take up our cross and follow him, we cannot be his disciple.

I said earlier, there is something disturbing about today's Gospel moment. This speaks to what happens after this event too. The Gospel tells us, many came to believe in Jesus. They saw the miraculous signs for themselves. They were excited with what was happening. The Gospel suggests Jesus was looking for more. Are we disciples who are just looking for signs and wonders? During this time of Lent, there is an opportunity for us to deepen our lives of faith. Jesus sees our weakness and frailty. He also sees our desire to stay close to him. To stay the course, and the challenges we encounter as disciples of Jesus.

Sincerely,

Bishop David Oakley

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