

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent (B09)

#### LOOKING AGAIN AT OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Today's Gospel shows Jesus in a busy and crowded Jerusalem. The Passover is getting nearer. There is lots going on in and around the Temple. Jesus says there is too much. The paraphernalia of the market place and the rules about access and sacrifice in the Temple have taken over. They are obscuring the true and simple act of worshipping Almighty God.

But Jesus doesn't just drive out the merchants and the money-changers, he takes time to teach them that they have lost sight of God and they are also preventing the people from seeing what God really wants them to see – namely, the love of God as expressed through him and his teaching – the Word made flesh.

Doing something extra special during Lent by fasting, almsgiving or being more attentive to our prayer, are well tried and trusted ways of reminding ourselves of our need for the love of God and the love and support of each other. They are good and practical reminders that we depend on our relationships for our very survival and growth.

The commandments given by God to Moses in that first reading from Exodus are there to help us live in good and honest relationships. They are not chains to restrict us. The things that restrict us and weigh us down are our own misdemeanours and human frailties that can often make us feel bad. This season of Lent is given to us by the Church to encourage us to re-focus on what really matters – the love of God and those around us. It is a time for ignoring if we can, the hectic and distracting market place that is the world around us.

That re-focussing on what really matters, namely our relationships, is also at the heart of the message given to us by Bishop Peter on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2007. On that day 15 months ago, he invited us into a process of consultation about the future of the diocese in a

fast changing and very challenging world. And he has repeated that invitation several times in his pastoral letters and in articles in *The Vine*, our diocesan monthly newspaper.

Bishop Peter said he believed God is calling us to have CONFIDENCE – to trust in God, in one another, and in ourselves, whatever our weaknesses and sinfulness.

He said that if we can have that confidence, that trust, we can then enter into CONVERSATION with God, with one another and with those around us. With confidence and trust, he said, we can have real conversation. That means conversation where we listen at least as much as we speak. Because that is the only conversation that leads to a change of heart. And listening, allowing God and others to speak to us is something that quite often we are not good at. Listening to God and each other is essential for Bishop, priests, and people.

Bishop Peter then went on to say that confident and real conversation then leads to CONNECTION which is what our faith is all about. We get disconnected from God and each other by our faults and failings. The Good News is that Jesus healed the disconnection brought about by sin and that healing is available to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that is freely and regularly available to us all.

So the call of the Scriptures for today, and echoed by Bishop Peter, is to look again at our relationships with God, with each other and with those around us. It is a call to use this Lent and those self-denying tools of fasting, almsgiving and prayer to help us walk away from the distractions of the market place at least for a time. To try to sweep aside whatever is obscuring that which God really want us to see, namely his love as it is presented to us in the person and the teachings of Jesus – the Word made flesh. Then we can focus individually and as a community on building God's kingdom here in this place. And you will see in your newsletter that John Fox and Jane Larkham, on behalf of Bishop

Peter, are inviting us again in these next few weeks to come along to reflect on his vision for our parishes, our new pastoral areas and our diocese in the years ahead. I hope that you really will take his invitation to heart and come along to the meetings we have set up. Every one of us is invited.

So let's pray that the God of all compassion and Father of Goodness will lead us through this Lent of repentance and reflection to the beauty of Easter Joy and to growth as God's people. And let's pray particularly for Bishop Peter as he seeks to lead us in bringing people to our loving God.

(16.3.09)