

Your Messiah has come and is risen. How many more dramatic actions do you need to be convinced of this? There's a heightened drama in John's account of this scene – the cleansing of the temple – more so than in the other gospel accounts, not least in its being placed at the beginning of Jesus's ministry rather than at the end – a frustrated shout perhaps to his own community, let alone all the unconvinced outsiders, the Greeks and the Jews, that far from the Cross being a sign of defeat it is a sign of victory, because in three days the temple of Christ's body will be rebuilt, and this body, this temple, unlike its human counterpart, can never be destroyed, will last forever, and we are invited to be part of it, to share in its eternal life. Now that's good news surely, but Lent is all about reminding us not to take this good news for granted, we can fall out of salvation, or fail to grasp the gift of it, through sin and sin is very subtle: we can, just like these market traders in the gentile court of the earthly temple, fail to make the connection between our interior and exterior lives. Obeying the Ten Commandments is just as bad in this respect if we keep them only as an exterior practice without conversion of heart. You will be glad to hear that Luther thought so too – to quote from the preface of his commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans:

“Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace..

It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly....

It is impossible to separate works from faith”

What he was fulminating against in his attack on indulgences was any action separated from an interior disposition graced by God. So Jesus comes to the earthly symbol of God's presence on earth, with God's engagement with all that is not God, and finds it full of people unaware of the immensity of God's love for them – no longer in tune with their God-given meaning, what, that is they were created for, and is, understandably, rather upset.

Milton Keynes was privileged on Friday and Saturday to host a conference representing most if not all of the Catholic Religious Life groups now present in the UK, as well as a few others too, though I doubt that MK was aware of this so low is our profile now in this country when it comes to good news. This prompted by a remark from Bishop Paul Mason – the bishop with special responsibility for safeguarding - a poisoned chalice if ever there was one, or a blessed opportunity, a cross or a resurrection depending on where one is coming from – which side of the cross one might say. To paraphrase: the media he says no longer know us, no longer want to know us as we really are – and now, in my own words, such has been the secularisation of our society aided and abetted by our own secularisation when, just like the market traders, we failed to realise the connection between our interior life and exterior actions and allowed physical and all sorts of other abuse to proliferate. We might claim innocence in this respect, we just did not know what was going on, but sin has been described as a lack of imagination and an unwillingness to question present practice – that bubble we all occupy and feel safe in but comes at a cost, a hindrance, a denial, a turning away from the suffering of others. What Jesus does in this scene is to re-present this suffering to those who have failed to see it and to suffer the consequences of their continued failure to see, to make that connection between their interior life and their external actions. That's Lent for us too : time to ask those difficult questions, or rather to allow them to be asked of us by Christ. What am I in denial of now? Well, if you'd only listen says Jesus, I will tell you – with a little help from the RLSS (Religious Life Safeguarding Service) and other life-saving institutions.

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