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Dear Friends

We are so familiar with the texts of the Gospels, that we run the risk of becoming over familiar. As we hear a particular text we recognise it immediately, know the story and it's ending, and perhaps stop listening. It's a temptation for us all. Our media driven culture has formed us to look for the sound bite, the latest news, the interesting story, the gossip. Familiar stories can become dull, and we look elsewhere for something more interesting.

The Gospel text we hear this Sunday is anything but dull however. Even a quick listen to this passage grabs our attention. Jesus is approaching the moment of his death and has gone up to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Entering the precincts of the Temple, he is met by a scene of chaos, noise, and frenzied selling of animals for sacrifice. He forms a whip out of some cords and drives all the sellers out, overturning their tables and scattering their money. An impressive feat for just one man!

What is interesting about this story is our reaction to it. Jesus has been identified as a man of love, compassion and kindness. This story shows a very different man. Have we thought this through? What emotions are at play here? Was Jesus angry, or was he simply indignant and frustrated. There's a difference. What motivated him? Why the sudden outburst? How do we reconcile this event in the life of Jesus with his miracles, healings and preaching?

I suspect that for most of us, this is just one more story from the Gospels with which we are very familiar. It takes our attention for a moment, then it is gone until the next time. That's a pity, because engaging deeply with the Gospel texts is the lifeblood of our faith and the key way in which we come to know and understand Jesus better. To put ourselves inside the story is a great help. To read it slowly, to notice every detail, to breathe in the atmosphere and listen carefully.

Jesus was as human as we are. We can identify with him, with his emotions, his passions, his joys, his tears. He comes to restore all things to their original purpose; human beings, religion, worship, and creation itself. He knew that the Temple in Jerusalem was the privileged meeting place between God and His people. It was a place of worship and prayer. But that purpose, as with many things in human life, had slipped from view, had become more obscure. It was selling, money, business that now took centre stage. Upon seeing it, Jesus reacted immediately and strongly; stop this! Return this sacred place to its original purpose! Stop turning my Father's House into a market!

This story finds its way into the Gospel readings of Lent as both a reminder and an inspiration to us. The Forty days are an opportunity for us to reflect on this return of things to their original purpose.



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Our relationship with God belongs at the centre of our lives. We are called to worship and pray. The path God has laid out for us in the Ten Commandments of the first reading still hold true. As we seek to return these things in our lives to their original purpose, we help to restore that purpose to the whole of creation around us.

The loving Jesus, the healing Jesus, the compassionate Jesus, the indignant and frustrated Jesus. Truly human like us. But each of these aspects of his life speaks to ours. God makes use of every emotion, every mood, every facet of our life to remind us of our original purpose; to love, to heal, to reach out, to worship and to pray. To be fully human and therefore pleasing to Him.

May God bless you and your loved ones.

**Father John**



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