



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON

ST PHILIP HOWARD CENTRE, 4 SOUTHGATE DRIVE, CRAWLEY, RH10 6RP

March 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Who could have believed it is already March 2021? As I write the sun is shining, birds are nesting, daffodils are coming out and Spring is in the air. What a welcome lift after a harsh Winter!

I hope you managed to make time to rest and relax over the February break after another unbelievably demanding half term in school. What you have contended with – and achieved – over the past twelve months is nothing short of remarkable. I know how much you are looking forward to the children returning to school next Monday 8th and how excited they will be to see their friends and teachers again. A return to some semblance of normality is much needed – what a journey we have all been on over the past year – and we have not yet arrived at our final destination!

Speaking of journeys, we are of course currently making our way through Lent, revisiting key moments in Jesus's public ministry. This coming Sunday, John's Gospel tells us that not long after the start of his public Ministry, a furious Jesus drove the merchants' sheep and oxen out of the Temple and angrily overturned the money changers' stalls, rebuking them for "turning my Father's house into a market."

Like the Catholic schools of today, the Temple was intended as a place of worship, of coming together and of learning. Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover each year. Jewish men were required to attend the religious celebrations surrounding Passover in Jerusalem, making the pilgrimage to worship at the Temple. At the age of twelve Jesus could take his place as an adult male, coming together with the other men for the Passover feast at the Temple. Three days later, a distraught Mary and Joseph found the missing twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple courts, engrossed in intellectual debate with the teachers of the Law.

Jesus not only learnt in the Temple as a boy; he also taught there on occasions as a man. An ancient temple was not supposed to be like a quiet cathedral. It was loud and bustling – and meant to be so. Yet Jesus angrily lambasted the Temple's merchants and money-changers. In a ministry marked by gentleness, mercy and kindness, this incident stands out. Both the selling of animals for sacrifices and the payment of the temple tax were activities required by Jewish law and central to the temple's functions. Many travellers found it easier to purchase the required sacrifice once they had arrived at Jerusalem to keep the Passover instead of bringing it with them. There was always the chance the animal may become unclean on the journey, causing their sacrifice to be null and void. The money-changers were there to convert various currencies into one standard coinage, the Tyrian shekel, that was used for the payment of the annual temple tax.

When Jesus lost his temper, he was angered not by the noise around him but by the mistaken priorities of those inside the Temple. Overlooking its role as a place where people assembled to worship and

study, the Temple's merchants and money-changers were treating it solely as a marketplace for their own advancement, not God's. They had lost all sense of reverence, purpose or perspective.

EDUCATION SERVICE

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This coming Sunday's Gospel is a helpful and timely reminder for us of the importance of balance. In Catholic education we pride ourselves on home, school and parish links; triangulating the relationship effectively helps the school-based community coalesce. I am always struck by the fact that the most successful Catholic schools are those which are driven by a deep-seated desire to nurture children and staff alike in a Christ-centred community, where all members are encouraged to worship, learn and grow together. There is a healthy symbiosis between all three elements; each facet is interwoven with others and all three are highly valued. When priorities are appropriate, everything else falls into place. In this way, Catholic schools' efforts to come together, worship and learn reflect the function of the Temple in Jesus's time.

Jesus tells us that wherever two or more are gathered in His name, He is with us; we can be confident therefore that the Father makes his home in school. Even in these most challenging of times, as children return once again after a year of scarcely imaginable disruption, and schools face unremitting pressure to make up for lost time, we must not lose our sense of reverence, purpose or perspective. The unremitting pressures of Ofsted and league tables create a highly competitive market, and in Catholic education, every one of us wants every member of our community to succeed - but not at all costs! As a diocesan family of schools, we must remain steadfast and true to our guiding principles and values, regardless of external pressures, because the disastrous alternative is to turn "my Father's house into a market."

As ever, may I extend heartfelt thanks to you, all staff and governors for all you are doing for the children, young people and families in your care.

Warmest wishes to you all,

Marie

Marie Ryan

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