

Lent is a time to hear Jesus' voice



BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

THE journey through the Christian year offers some 'punctuation marks': opportunities to pause as the story of our lives unfolds; a chance to reset, keep on spiritual track and to examine our priorities.

It allows us to question, in the midst of multiple and competing voices that clamour for our allegiance, whose voice is actually uppermost in our lives.

It also allows us to create space – or spiritual punctuation – to be addressed by the voice of Jesus. The days of Lent, Holy Week and Easter give us this kind of gift.

Jesus knew his disciples' need to stay on track. In John 17, known as his high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for all those who would follow him, saying: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17). The whole of that chapter repays slow, prayerful reading.

As voices of opposition are heard around them, Jesus recognises the vulnerability of his first disciples.

The voices that will oppose, reject and pour violent scorn upon Jesus will, all too soon, turn upon his followers. For the vocation of disciples, then and now, is to follow Jesus into a world that has

not believed 'the Father sent the Son'.

In the understanding of St John's Gospel, 'the world' is both the object of God's unconditional love, and also a shorthand to describe those on earth (for example, the religious leaders of the day) or in the spiritual realm (for example, 'the evil one' of 17:17), who conspire to oppose the way of Jesus Christ.

It is 'the world,' understood in this shorthand sense, which provides the crucial backdrop to Jesus' prayer.

Thus Jesus prays, on their behalf, that the One Jesus calls 'Father' will sanctify the disciples: that he will inspire their holiness, sustain the integrity of their witness and protect them by the truth of his word.

It is the Father's voice, embodied in Jesus 'the Word made flesh' (John 1:14), which alone can keep Christian life and witness on track and faithful in the world.

My dear brothers and sisters will you join me this Lent, Holy Week and Easter in seeking to create space – by some spiritual punctuation in the story of your lives – to listen for his voice today?

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Front page photo: Rob Wicks, Greenbelt