

Where does Jesus come from? Who is he claiming to be? What is the message he wants to give, and with what authority does he speak? The impact of Jesus on the Jews is spelt out very clearly. We can sense the building-up of the forces that will destroy him. It is good for us to try to understand how these forces are working.

What Jesus is doing is what Wisdom discerns as the work of the prophet: to differ from the world and to be like God; quietly to oppose the world, to bring it to some kind of judgment. Here we can see the difference between Christianity and human decency. If Jesus were simply a nice chap, he might have died in his bed. The reason he doesn't die in his bed is that his kind of holiness questions the deal the world offers and exposes it for what it is. Suddenly, in his presence, people feel the need to renegotiate their whole lives. The basis on which we have been operating has shifted; there are new standards to be met.

Jesus is like this because his basis is simply his total oneness with the Father. It isn't a matter of what human beings might find acceptable. "Human approval means nothing to me", he said yesterday: "you look to one another for approval, instead of seeking the favour of God." The quality which astonishes his hearers is that this closeness to God gives him no fear, no inquiet. In his closeness to the Father Jesus is totally at peace, settled in himself. This is what reveals to them that it isn't a question of his human obedience to God. He is showing them that he is himself divine. This is the unthinkable claim that is forming in their minds, and which makes them catch their breath.

If it's true, they have to rethink their whole religion, their whole understanding of God, their whole understanding of what it means to be human. This radical, revolutionary prospect is what makes them suddenly afraid, and forces them to become his enemies, to declare war on him.

It is what will arrest him, condemn him, and nail him to the Cross.

Let us not think that we have found some secret formula that will allow us to have Jesus without rethinking our whole lives. If what he says is true, we have to demolish everything, and rebuild our nature on his new pattern. As Paul puts it, we must die with him, in order to be raised to divine life. To understand this is our programme for Lent; to encounter it, is the Church's plan for Easter.