

## **A Pastoral Message during the third lockdown from Bishop David.**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Last week, we celebrated the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. 'Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John.' This is an historical event. It is also a moment of mystical significance. Our Lord's true identity is revealed to us as He hears words which must sustain Him throughout His public ministry and during the paschal mystery. We too need to hear words which will encourage us in our lives today. This Sunday, the Second of the Year, we hear that John the Baptist is a contemplative. The Baptist 'stared hard' at Jesus and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God.' In the midst of challenging circumstances for God's people, the prophet is not blown around like wastepaper in our streets. He stands firm within Israel's relationship with God. The Baptist is someone who observes the drama of unfolding events and can see things from an important faith perspective. The beloved Son of the Father is amongst us. He has come to refocus our hearts and minds upon the forgiveness which God offers us through the ministry, the dying and rising of Jesus. And now it is our moment in history. Our world today is experiencing the full effects of an unfolding pandemic. Most of us are challenged by this sustained and protracted onslaught on our lives and our ways of living. We are being encouraged, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Nevertheless, we are humbled before the statistics and see the effects of the pandemic all around us. A horrific number of people are losing their lives to this virus. A growing number of our fellow citizens are in hospital and really suffering because of their illness. Unemployment grows like another virus and our society is saturated with fear, anxiety and uncertainty. How do we navigate our way through these bad news waters? We follow Jesus like the first two disciples in the Gospel. Jesus turns to each one of us and asks, 'what do you want?' We too may answer with a question, 'Teacher where do you live?' When we find ourselves in the eye of the storm, to find shelter with Jesus, truly present to us in the word of Sacred Scripture and the Blessed Sacrament is a place of true refuge. I am reminded of the words of a beautiful hymn to the Sacred Heart, 'O Sacred Heart, our home lies deep in thee... O Sacred Heart, our trust is all in thee, For though earth's night be dark and drear, thou breathest rest where thou art near, O Sacred Heart.'

+ David

Rt Revd Dr David J Oakley Bishop of Northampton