



SUNDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2020

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

The Feast of Christ the King (A): Matthew 25:31-46

Some scenes are crying out for the big screen treatment. The camera dwelling on the Son of Man seated on the throne of glory, then slowly beginning to zoom out to embrace the serried ranks of people of all nations – the sight is overwhelming. From a seat in the middle stalls, it's awesome. But none of us are sitting in the middle stalls, we're somewhere in the heaving masses down there. This is personal.

Matthew's Gospel picture of the final judgement puts me on the spot and you too. Final means final. We've been assessed. We had our chance. We made our choices and they're being played back to us. You're going to left or right. It's you who decided and there's no going back. What a powerful lesson. Jesus tells the story so that we're under no illusions about the criteria God uses to measure us. It's where practical love meets real need.

In God's world the poor come first. They have to. The God of love cares when his children are in need and sends us to those requiring help. Love cannot ignore the cry for assistance. Our Scriptures make that clear. Our God hears their cry and we are his answer. Judgement rests on what we do about it. Remember the Good Samaritan story - a person in need is our neighbour, who we must love as much as we love ourselves.

The present pandemic is a global issue presenting danger to us all. Our human family looks to the best and wisest for help. Yet in a world becoming smaller by the hour through rapid technological advances, we also witness ego-driven competition and conflict. Neglect, poverty and division are the fallout.

On the world stage Pope Francis is vocal about our shared humanity and about the corrosive effects of greed and exploitation. How sensitive we are to avoiding both may well depend on how we see Jesus in people with insufficient food, lack of clean water, inadequate clothing and unattended in times of sickness and imprisonment. From our relative excess we read the scenarios the Lord paints. Doing what we can requires consistent thought and our accepting that he's talking to each of us personally.

Applying the Gospel to myself frankly makes me feel guilty. But I need that in order to address the needs around me. Needy people have names, have families, cry and bleed like we do, like Jesus did. God doesn't do crowds, he's very particular, he sees individuals. You and I rely on that; his love for each of us is specific. Others rely on it too. God's answer to them may depend on us, uncomfortable though it feels.

Today is opportunity. Seize the day.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Pope Francis speaking of the pandemic

If everything is connected, it is hard to imagine that this global disaster is unrelated to our way of approaching reality, our claim to be absolute masters of our own lives and of all that exists. I do not want to speak of divine retribution, nor would it be sufficient to say that the harm we do to nature is itself the punishment for our offences. The world is itself crying out in rebellion. We are reminded of the well-known verse of the poet Virgil that evokes the "tears of things", the misfortunes of life and history.

All too quickly, however, we forget the lessons of history, the teacher of life. Once this health crisis passes, our worst response would be to plunge even more deeply into feverish consumerism and new forms of egotistic self-preservation. God willing, after all this, we will think no longer of 'them' and 'those' but only "us". If only this may prove not only to be just another tragedy of history from which we learned nothing. If only we might keep in mind all those elderly persons who died for lack of respirators, partly as a result of the dismantling, year after year, of healthcare systems. If only this immense sorrow may not prove useless but enable us to take a step forward towards a new style of life. If only we might rediscover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth, with all its faces, all its hands and all its voices beyond the walls that we have erected.

Fratelli Tutti paragraphs 34 and 35.