



SUNDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

6th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 5: 17-37

A friend of mine - and a proper joker - once told me if he heard strange noises coming from his car engine and other parts, he just turned the radio up louder! Sometimes we don't want to know and don't want to have to deal with difficulties. You know what that's like. It's the same for folks who put off going to the doctor's.

Better to check the details. Nip it in the bud. Be up front and honest. Admit to human reluctance and get round to dealing with it. The fond hope that things will come right without intervention is a risk we may regret. An early start, possibly with help, pays dividends. We can have a similar problem with our lifestyle before God. There'll be things we have to tackle and usually we know what they are. We can put off, be too busy, be casual or serious in our intentions. A Gospel like today's reminds us uncomfortably we have work to do.

Laws ideally undergird acceptable codes of behaviour. God's commandments and major teaching from Moses usually concentrate on external actions - don't kill, steal, commit adultery or tell lies. But Jesus expands these inherited precepts - in his words, he "completes them".

Go back a few paces. Long before these forbidden actions, a lot happens inside, in the mind. Feelings of dislike can turn into dismissal and hatred. Attraction can slide into lust and unwholesome desires. There's a continuum here. Beware the slippery slope, the thin end of the wedge. Strong human drives are in us all. Admit and name them for what they are. Pause. Think. Open a space for God's wisdom Spirit and check any drifting.

Do we take much notice of what we hear in the Gospel reading? Jesus gives us a strong kick. He shocks us with fantastic mind-pictures - pluck out eyes and cut off hands (don't try this at home!). He overstates the case to wake us up and get us to notice. This Gospel is meant to unsettle us, get us to review our idle thoughts before we make more excuses. Imagine Jesus gazing at us and nodding - we can do this if we want to. I doubt there's a good reason for turning him down.

You might need to prepare prayerfully to be reconciled first with someone before coming to the altar, or change your TV viewing or social media habits. Before we shrink from giving ourselves a talking to, let's remind ourselves that if the way we think doesn't control the way we behave, the way we behave will govern the way we think. The Lord invites and expects decisions. Today is a brand new day. It won't happen again. Engage in conversation with Jesus before new distractions divert us from our best intentions. I dare you.



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Pope Francis on politics

Charity is the spiritual heart of politics, always a preferential love shown to those in greatest need; it undergirds everything we do on their behalf. Only a gaze transformed by charity can enable the dignity of others to be recognized and, as a consequence, the poor to be acknowledged and valued in their dignity, respected in their identity and culture, and thus truly integrated into society. That gaze is at the heart of the authentic spirit of politics. It sees paths open up that are different from those of a soulless pragmatism. It makes us realize that the scandal of poverty cannot be addressed by promoting strategies of containment that only tranquilize the poor and render them tame and inoffensive. How sad it is when we find, behind allegedly altruistic works, the other being reduced to passivity. What are needed are new pathways of self-expression and participation in society. Education serves these by making it possible for each human being to shape his or her own future. Here too we see the importance of the principle of *subsidiarity*, which is inseparable from the principle of *solidarity*.

These considerations help us recognize the urgent need to combat all that threatens or violates fundamental human rights. Politicians are called to tend to the needs of individuals and peoples. To tend to those in need takes strength and tenderness, effort and generosity in the midst of a functional and privatized mindset that inexorably leads to a 'throwaway culture'. It involves taking responsibility for the present with its situations of utter marginalization and anguish, and being capable of bestowing dignity upon it. It will likewise inspire intense efforts to ensure that everything be done to protect the status and dignity of the human person. Politicians are doers, builders with ambitious goals, possessed of a broad, realistic and pragmatic gaze that looks beyond their own borders. Their biggest concern should not be about a drop in the polls, but about finding effective solutions to the phenomenon of social economic exclusion with its baneful consequences.

- *Fratelli tutti paras 187-188*