



SUNDAY 13 DECEMBER 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

3rd Sunday of Advent (B): John 1: 19-28

You know what it's like. You go into a building, begin looking around and someone official comes up to you and asks, 'Can I help you?' Sometimes it's genuine. Sometimes it has feebly disguised undertones of 'What are you doing here?' and maybe 'Who are you?'. The look on the face and the tone of voice are a giveaway, intended or not.

The authorities sent people to John the Baptist with instructions to check him out. 'Who are you? - or even 'Who do you think you are? You come here, preaching in public, what's your ID? We need an answer'. They check possibilities - the Messiah, Elijah, the Prophet?? If not, 'Where do you fit in here? What do you have to say for yourself'?

John has no doubts about his mission. His job description has been forecast by the prophet Isaiah. He's the voice sent to make a straight way for the Lord. But they're not finished checking his credentials, querying his right to baptise. In our world of having to carry identity proofs for work and other roles - I have four at present - being able to present provenance of who we are hasn't disappeared, only changed expression and become more widespread.

The full truth of who we are is known only to God. We're aware of many of the roles we perform - we have to be - but why the Lord has put us here and what he accomplishes through us is possibly best not to be revealed yet; we may otherwise get in the way. What we do know about our journey are the obligations and expectations to follow the Lord by making his teachings design our lives.

Our mission, following John the Baptist, is to make Jesus known. This mission - the word means we're being sent - has been given a Church, the community of Jesus' followers. It shapes us, daily, weekly and yearly into people who allow the Spirit who inhabits our humanity to show the face of God wherever we are and wherever we go. A tall order. But the mystery of God's love in us requires that we give time and thought to how we live out each day.

Continuing to study and sit with the Lord, giving space to learning and receiving from him, will be part of the measure of our effectiveness. Like learning anything, it needs time and patience. Incrementally we acquire a mindset and an approach to life that, not unlike job skills, becomes second nature to who we are. Then, whether we pick up the pen or not, we're writing the book for others.



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Pope Francis on equality

Every brother or sister in need, when abandoned or ignored by the society in which I live, becomes an existential foreigner, even though born in the same country. They may be citizens with full rights, yet they are treated like foreigners in their own country. Racism is a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding, and lurks in waiting.

I would like to mention some of the hidden exiles who are treated as foreign bodies in society. Many persons with disabilities feel that they exist without belonging and without participating. Much still prevents them from being fully enfranchised. Our concern should be not only to care for them but to ensure their active participation in the civil and church community. That is a demanding and even tiring process, yet one that will gradually contribute to the forming of consciences capable of acknowledging each individual as a unique and unrepeatable person. I think, too, of the elderly who, also due to their disability, are sometimes considered a burden. Yet each of them is able to offer a unique contribution to the common good through their remarkable life stories.

Let me repeat: we need to have the courage to give a voice to those who are discriminated against due to their disability, because sadly, in some countries even today, people find it hard to acknowledge them as persons of equal dignity.

Fratelli Tutti paras 97-98