



SUNDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2022

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

33rd Sunday of the Year (C) : Luke 21: 5-19

Alf is an old pal. He told me he'd looked up the meaning of the word 'dystopian' in the dictionary. 'It's a word that's cropping up more and more', he said as he read out the meaning to me. Dystopian denotes an imagined state or society where there is great suffering or injustice. 'Hey, there's not much imaginary about it—it's here already, mate'. Alf said with feeling.

We don't need to rehearse for ourselves the major concerns we have for the regular diet of news topics that bombard us daily. Some folks no longer watch or listen to the news, they find it too depressing. I understand but disagree about losing touch. We can argue about the choices news editors make, about their seeming to want to frighten us. We know heaps of great and good things happen every day - but they don't have the drawing power that suffering, catastrophe and injustice have. What's it saying about us?

COP27 talks about caring for the Earth, repairing the damage we've done and preventing more. It's filled our screens this week. We may think we've heard it before - we have and haven't. It's changing every day and so are we. Hopefully we try to keep pace with what life asks of us, but we don't find change easy - unless we're causing it.

Jesus was no stranger to bad news. Today's Gospel talks of impending ruin for the temple - and it happened some 40 years later. He talks of fake news—imposters claiming they're saviours, he talks of natural disasters, human suffering and betrayal. He had no illusions about the world of his earthly time and it's a safe bet he's clued into our world now. It's actually why he's put us here. We rightly now call ourselves 'The Body of Christ'.

Alf is uncomfortable about this responsibility. He questions God about what he's doing about our world. It may be unwelcome but God is asking the very same question of Alf, of you and me. The dystopia of the world is not of God's making, there's human agency behind it all. Our lives must redeem these times (Ephesians 5:16), that is, buy them back, restore goodness where others fail to act or don't care.

Our God so loved this world that he gave his only Son. He still loves it. And he's entrusted his work to us. God looked on his creation and knew it to be good. We must oppose injustice and inhumanity, bring faith, hope and love to God's beautiful creation, see possibility in every challenge and work with others to show an alternative vision, not shaped by algorithms but honest graft to uphold the dignity of everyone. 'Do not be afraid, little flock, it has pleased your Father to give you the Kingdom. (Luke 12:32).



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Pope Francis talking of St Francis

I believe that Saint Francis is the example *par excellence* of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason. His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, 'from a reflection on the primary source of all things, he would call creatures no matter how small, by the name of brother or sister'. Such a conviction cannot be written off as naïve romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behavior, if we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

- *Laudato Si*, - paras 10-11