



SUNDAY 16 APRIL 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

2nd Sunday of Easter (A): John 20: 19-31

Listen up, friends. There may be a bit of the Apostle Thomas in each of us. Today's Gospel shares a powerful story. Being familiar with how it goes can disguise the message. We're invited to make the story our own.

Thomas is an attractive, down to earth, no nonsense individual, not easily persuaded, no push-over. A man who doesn't buy into group think. He has a mind of his own, someone who asks lots of questions, doesn't take things for granted. He's not awkward. His personality makes demands on how he reads the world. Good to have in a team. He'll interrupt first impressions, slow down hasty decision making. But it must have been hard to see the others lit up by their visit of the risen Jesus and not feel left out.

Whatever went through his mind during the following week we'll never know. We do know that Jesus understood Thomas and loved him. He'd be familiar with Thomas' 'Prove it' mentality and he comes back for him, offering exactly what Thomas' stubborn, brazen assertions required. It's personal—and beautiful.

By then Thomas doesn't need them. The game is up. Humbled, defeated, wiped out and overwhelmed, he makes the short and simplest, brilliant acceptance of the one he once knew as Master, teacher, rabbi, prophet or whatever. He knows he's looking now into the gentle face of the Lord, his God.

You and I won't have moments to equal that. But hopefully, over time, when we've seen the faith of others and known that we lag behind, that they've got something we don't have in the same way and we may find that we're missing something, know that we're in good company. The journey of acceptance is not smooth, can be clumsy, pock-marked by doubt, by lack of thought, prayer and busyness. But the Lord and God of Thomas understands each of us, as he understood him. Our prayer may be that he'll come for us personally as he did for Thomas. Show himself to us in ways we recognize.

There's a world hidden in Thomas' statement of acceptance. Whole libraries have been filled with teasing out the wonder of Jesus' death and resurrection. In our own personal story, the Lord has given us his Spirit. He's entrusted you and me to do his work of loving and forgiving. Maybe we'll see his wounded face in the desperate looks of the needy, the bereft, the overstressed parent, the lonely teenager.

It is through us that people will experience the risen Jesus. We are his disciples today. Amazing though it sounds, it is through sight of us, through our touch that he walks our streets, our homes and schools. We learn by doing. You are not starting from scratch. The Spirit of Jesus has been working in you since your baptism. This year's Easter stories remind us of what's happening without our full awareness. Thank you. Doubt no longer but believe.



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Pope Francis' view of the church

When the mark of Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen, is not present in church, closed and elite groups are formed, and no effort is made to go forth and seek out those who are distant or the immense multitudes who thirst for Christ. Evangelical fervour is replaced by the empty pleasure of complacency and self-indulgence.

This way of thinking also feeds the vainglory of those who are content to have a modicum of power and would rather be the general of the defeated army than a mere private in a unit which continues to fight. How often we dream up vast apostolic projects, meticulously planned, just like defeated generals! But this is to deny our history as a Church, which is glorious precisely because it is a history of sacrifice, of hopes and daily struggles, of lives spent in service and fidelity to work, tiring as it may be, for all work is "the sweat of the brow". Instead, we waste time talking about "what needs to be done" - in Spanish we call this the sin of "habriaqueismo" - like spiritual masters and pastoral experts who give instructions from on high. We indulge in endless fantasies and we lose contact with the real lives and difficulties of our people.

Those who have fallen into this worldliness look on from above and afar, they reject the prophecy of their brothers and sisters, they discredit those who raise questions, they constantly point out all the mistakes of others and they are obsessed by appearances. Their hearts are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests, and as a consequence they neither learn from their sins nor are they genuinely open to forgiveness. This is a tremendous corruption disguised as a good.

We need to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor. God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self centredness cloaked on an outward religiosity bereft of God. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel!

- The Joy of the Gospel paras 95-97