



SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 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 Assumption of Our Lady: Luke 1:39-56

Tony showed me the letter Amy had written when his wife Clare died. Amy had been her best friend since schooldays and if you saw them together you had to smile. They had an instinctive understanding, you'd swear they could read each other's minds. The support they breathed was attractive and tenacious.

The letter was beautiful and it was simple. Advertising jargon has reduced the power of superlatives and the world of celebrity cheapened what others suggest we should value. Clare and Amy read, watched, discussed, laughed and sang together, learnt and shared together. Tony always delighted in their friendship, admitted he couldn't fathom or provide what these two had, but rejoiced in their strength and their fun. In addition, what he and Clare had was deep and incomparably their own.

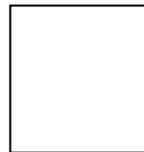
Amy's letter to Tony was direct, uncontrived. She wrote as she spoke. It didn't mention the word love but was a stunning description of a unity full of colour and surprise, aching in its sense of loss, but brimful of how they saw wonder in what was ordinary. Words couldn't describe the tears they shared during Clare's illness nor were words necessary. They knew what they had and knew it was a gift beyond price.

The Gospel passage for today's feast attempts to describe the sense of wonder and gratitude that two women, Mary and Elizabeth, knew and celebrated as they rehearsed in friendship what God was doing within them. We can speculate about their table talk and their prayers, their joys, anxieties and trust. But the companionship they shared was also God's presence, to carry them through intended lives beyond their understanding of just how significant they each were and are forever. Their Mondays and Fridays probably looked much like everyone's, but the momentous parts they played in your story and mine demand time for reflection.

This is God's story and it's the women's story. St Luke's Gospel quarries the Scriptures to describe Mary's thanks and Elizabeth's joy. They must have talked between themselves often about God revealing himself in human characters throughout their history. How much they understood of what we now know is probably very little. And how much we know of what they had in their time together is likewise so limited. It was theirs, not ours.

The deep friendships we have - and may know and see in others - help us glimpse a God of relationship who is three yet one, and speaks to us powerfully through the ways he brings us together.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Always has been. And is with us too, thank God.



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More from Pope Francis

I feel tremendous gratitude to all those who are committed to working in and for the Church. Here I do not wish to discuss at length the activities of the different pastoral workers, from bishops down to those who provide the most humble and hidden services. Rather, I would like to reflect on the challenges that all of them must face in the context of our current globalised culture. But in justice, I must say first that the contribution of the Church in today's world is enormous. The pain and the shame we feel at the sins of some members of the Church, and at our own, must never make us forget how many Christians are giving their lives in love.

They help so many people to be healed or to die in peace in makeshift hospitals. They are present to those enslaved by different addictions in the poorest places on earth. They devote themselves to the education of children and young people. They take care of the elderly who have been forgotten by everyone else. They look for ways to communicate values in hostile environments. They are dedicated in many other ways to showing an immense love for humanity inspired by the God who became man. I am grateful for the beautiful example given to me by so many Christians who joyfully sacrifice their lives and their time. This witness comforts and sustains me in my own effort to overcome selfishness and to give more fully of myself.

(Paragraph 76 from 'The Joy of the Gospel')