



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

20th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 15: 21-28

People make demands. We all do. If demands from others come across as pushy and putting us under pressure then fairness requires we give these demands and alternative options greater scrutiny.

Jesus is out of his area. He's north from Galilee in pagan territory and is accosted by a desperate mum. Her daughter is tormented by a devil and this woman is not going to go away - you probably wouldn't either. Her persistence changes Jesus' mind. Her need stretches his understanding of the parameters of his mission. A tormented child and a fiercely caring mother help him to see himself as Lord of all people and not just Messiah for his Jewish people.

The Father of love speaks to his Son through the needs of the poor - a language with no frontiers. The sparring between Jesus and the woman challenges both to a win-win conclusion - a revelation of Jesus as Lord and a mother and child set free.

Notice that the disciples wanted Jesus to grant the woman's request in order to get rid of her because she was shouting after them! Thankfully he engages with her instead to elicit an emphatic statement of faith.

Can we stay long enough with whatever challenges our understanding so as to learn more about ourselves and not seek easy ways to avoid facing issues? The preferred choice of the disciples in today's story would have meant a critical opportunity for growth and change was missed.

There is no progress without change. Growth requires that things don't stay the same. Our understanding of anything simply exposes the current limit of our knowledge. Greater awareness and wisdom require humble acceptance that we still have more to learn. Life pushes boundaries. It's meant to. Human and spiritual development proceed along uneven roads marked by challenges, doubts and opportunities as we make choices and respond to what life brings. St John Henry Newman's celebrated quote is succinct - "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often".

It's daunting to be faced by desperate people with seeming unaddressed or insurmountable problems. Engaging honestly with the person and the issue maintains dignity, opens possibility and may surface previously unseen ways forward. Simply dismissing difficult people is not Jesus' way. Hopefully his disciples, then and now, learn to copy his internal struggle and move to better outcomes.



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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')