



SUNDAY 2 AUGUST 2020

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

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## ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

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### 18th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 14: 13-21

“How did he do it?” It was a heartfelt reaction to today’s Gospel story. The question came from Bernie. She’d found things achingly difficult since a close friend had recently been killed by someone with seeming scant regard for life.

Coping with the news of John the Baptist’s murder, Jesus and the Apostles needed to get away for some personal time - but it didn’t work out as intended. Bernie was amazed and overawed. Sensitive and emotionally intelligent, she watches a bereaved Jesus and companions giving their time to thousands of people seeking healing when they were grieving themselves. “I know he’s God”, Bernie said, “but he’s human too”.

I was pleased by our conversation. Bernie didn’t overlook the start of Matthew’s Gospel passage here or simply label the episode as the very familiar story of the feeding of the five thousand. Her own experience of a friend’s brutal death brought her close to Jesus’ feelings on hearing John the Baptist had been beheaded. Scripture comes alive for us in new ways when our life experience opens us to seeing aspects of stories we’d previously overlooked or been unable to appreciate.

Jesus was often waylaid by needy people. We all are. Brought by their own immediate needs, they may well be oblivious to yours or anyone else’s. Jesus had told the Good Samaritan story to teach that our neighbour is simply a person in need - and we’re commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves. In today’s Gospel passage, the people are not going to go away. Neither is Jesus. The message was not lost on his disciples. It shouldn’t be lost on thee or me either. Taking personal time out sometimes fails.

This Gospel event has other consequences too. John the Baptist’s life mission is over. Jesus’ mission shifts gear. His time is now. Surrounded by sick people and desperate relatives aligns Jesus with the best medics and carers who have great humanity - or should that be the other way round?

But our story moves on to feeding. It’s a big story of a God who puts himself out, creating abundance from unlikely means, raising questions for later. Feeding others gives so many messages - of care, love, thoughtfulness, generosity and respect. Old wisdom reminds us all that if you’re feeling low, go and help someone - you’ll receive more than you give. Our extravagant Lord comes into his own here, moving on from John the Baptist, making healing and hospitality the benchmarks of the God who lives and cries with us, nourishes and eats with us. You couldn’t make it up. Thank God.



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### More from Pope Francis

The Catholic faith of many peoples is nowadays being challenged by the proliferation of new religious movements, some of which tend to fundamentalism while others seem to propose a spirituality without God. This is, on the one hand, a human reaction to a materialistic, consumerist and individualistic society, but it is also a means of exploiting the weakness of people living in poverty and on the fringes of society, people who make ends meet amid great human suffering and are looking for immediate solutions to their needs.

We must recognise that if part of our baptised people lack a sense of belonging to the Church, this is also due to certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of our parishes and communities, or a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems. In many places an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach, as does a concentration on administering the sacraments apart from other forms of evangelization.

Secularisation tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism. These have led to a general sense of disorientation, especially in the periods of adolescence and young adulthood which are so vulnerable to change.

While the Church insists on the existence of objective moral norms which are valid for everyone, there are those in our culture who portray this teaching as unjust, that is, as opposed to basic human rights. Such claims usually follow from a form of moral relativism that is joined, not without inconsistency, to a belief in the absolute rights of individuals. In this view, the Church is perceived as promoting a particular prejudice and as interfering with individual freedom. We are living in an information-driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data - all treated as being of equal importance - and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment. In response, we need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values.

*(Paragraphs 63 and 64 from ‘The Joy of the Gospel’)*