



SUNDAY 20 MARCH 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

3rd Sunday of Lent (C) - Luke 13: 1-9

You may have come across the old story of a man complaining to God, asking 'What are you doing about this terrible war?' God's reply was blunt - 'I was just going to ask you the same question!'

War is not God's problem, it's ours. It's human decisions that wreak havoc and scandalous, untold misery and death on neighbours, young and old. Some people blame God for many things. In today's Gospel, Jesus sets the record straight. Don't let God be a cop-out, an excuse for humanity's ills. He came and lived with us as a signal of how much God has bound himself to us in service and compassion.

The tragedies we see on our news channels and hear and read about daily are not punishments from God. Sadly, any versions of faith preaching that message have a strange understanding of God. Jesus dismisses this mistaken Jewish attitude but, as usual, uses the occasion to prompt his hearers to get their act together and change their lives.

Thankfully the response to help the victims of the war in Ukraine demonstrates the kind of compassionate humanity that expresses God's presence. The devastation inflicted on innocent people requires intervention and sensitive care. God identifies with the victims. The care shown by his followers and many others is a potent sign of defiant love. God supports the selflessness shown to those in need. It was and continues to be, through us, Jesus' constant message.

The Lord was a victim of brutality and power. Rather than living distantly from us, God chose to come and share the life of dependent, fractured humanity and to soak up in himself the cruelty and disregard shown by cowardly individuals when their plans are thwarted. We can, I hope, be inspired by the solidarity God has with us, his people.

We continue to pray for and help victims and good people who, like some of Jesus' contemporaries, are misinformed and manipulated to support causes they are misled to trust. They too are victims. In war there are no winners. Love is the only daring and real gift we can bring in God's name. It has many faces. Thank you for yours.



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A word from Pope Francis

Self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today. Isolated individuals can lose their ability and freedom to escape the utilitarian mindset, and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness. Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. This task will make such tremendous demands of humankind that could never be achieved by individual initiative or even by the united effort of people bred in an individualistic way. The work of dominating the world calls for a union of skills and a unity of achievement that can only grow from quite a different attitude. The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion.

This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works. 'Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing ... and your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (*Matthew 6: 3-4*). It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings. By developing our individual, God given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems and in offering ourselves to God 'as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable' (*Romans 12:1*). We do not understand our superiority as a reason for personal glory or irresponsible dominion, but rather as a different capacity which, in its turn, entails a serious responsibility stemming from our faith.

- Laudato Si - paras 219-220