



SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 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

25th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 20: 1-16

The guy on his phone was making no effort to speak quietly. I wasn't deliberately earwiggling his side of the conversation, the whole bus could hear him.

"Sid hasn't the slightest idea of where I stand...", he was telling his mate and the rest of us. "He thinks completely differently to me..." he was saying. "He just can't see it, you know. Maybe he doesn't want to. He's stuck in his own little world..." And so he went on. Some of the others on the bus were pretending not to notice, others looked annoyed, some smiled.

We've all been there. We've all felt frustrated at someone's inability or unwillingness to understand, individuals seemingly unable to think outside their own ingrained routines and preferences. Maybe a reluctance to see things differently is a defence against possibly having to change. Change is unsettling. We like not to be disturbed. We may be surprised to learn that some others may see us that way. It's easier to spot and criticise our own faults in someone else. The technical term is projection.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus told so many parables about the Kingdom, about seeing things as he sees them, with the eyes of heaven, with the look and passion of love? He piles images one on top of another in the hope we might get the message, glimpse what he's getting at, that the penny might drop. His teaching is insistent. Are we being browbeaten? In the nicest way, yes we are, in the fond hope that we might see how we're actually resisting an invitation - 'Make your home in me, as I make mine in you', Jesus says (John 15:4). Home-making requires thought and hard graft.

Today's Gospel story of the workers in the vineyard is a beauty. Being unemployed is demeaning, feeling unvalued. And in an age before social benefits, when you're the breadwinner how do you feed your family? Like last Sunday's Gospel of the unforgiving servant (We discovered that he's you and me, remember?), today's story also has a surprising twist. Every worker gets a full day's pay, whether having worked the full twelve hour shift or even only a one hour stint.



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More from Pope Francis

One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, "sourpusses". Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents. While painfully aware of our own frailties, we have to march on without giving in, keeping in mind what the Lord said to Saint Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil. The evil spirit of defeatism is brother to the temptation to separate, before its time, the wheat from the weeds; it is the fruit of an anxious and self-centred lack of trust.

In some places a spiritual "desert" has evidently come about, as the result of attempts by some societies to build without God or to eliminate their Christian roots. In those places "the Christian world is becoming sterile, and it is depleting itself like an overexploited ground, which transforms into a desert". In other countries, violent opposition to Christianity forces Christians to hide their faith in their own beloved homeland. This is another painful kind of desert. But family and the workplace can also be a parched place where faith nonetheless has to be preserved and communicated. Yet "it is starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us men and women. In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today's world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, by the example of their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive". In these situations we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink. At times, this becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!

The Joy of the Gospel - paras 85-86