



SUNDAY 21 AUGUST 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

21st Sunday of the Year (C) : Luke 13: 22-30

I'm a big fan of 'More or Less', Tim Harford's BBC Radio 4 programme about the accuracy of statistics in the public domain.

We get numbers thrown at us all the time. Headcounts, percentages, targets - the media and the Government seem obsessed with figures and we are all aware that you can demonstrate or obscure things by the way you choose to select statistics - and who is able to say they're correct?

In the Gospel story at Mass today, someone asks Jesus, 'Will there be only a few saved?' Being a good Jew, he doesn't answer the question directly but effectively throws it back to the inquirer. Don't be bothered about numbers. Curb your curiosity and strive to live in a compassionate and loving manner. The Jews are the chosen people - God came to them first. Sadly Jesus and his teaching did not meet their expectations of the God-sent Messiah so they rejected him.

To be saved is not about just belonging to this group or that. Many individuals across the world are committed to living and working for truth, justice and freedom. God does the saving and the judging, it's not up to us. Thankfully (and hopefully) our Church has lost its arrogant and judgemental attitude towards other faiths and indeed other Christian churches and groups. The Second Vatican Council - nearly sixty years ago now - teaches us clearly that Jesus is the way to the Father but God works in many ways within and outwith the Church. Those sharing the best of our values we should accept, work with, dialogue with and receive with love.

The Lord teaches us to aim to enter by the narrow door. It's not cool to some folks to be less than broad minded and keeping all options open. We can't. Our focus is on Jesus and the way he and his Father teach us to live. A friend once suggested you can be so broad-minded that your brain drops out! We know where we need to go - 'Seek first the Kingdom of God' (Matthew 6:33) 'Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate. (Luke 6:36) 'Love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34).

St Augustine once noted that there are many in the Church who are not in the kingdom and many in the kingdom who do not belong to the Church. You may be surprised by who you'll be sitting next to in heaven - they may be likewise surprised to see you there!

Discipline is the art of being a disciple. It's the same word. Get it?



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Pope Francis on The Mass

If we had somehow arrived in Jerusalem after Pentecost and had felt the desire not only to have information about Jesus of Nazareth but rather the desire still to be able to meet him, we would have had no other possibility than that of searching out his disciples so that we could hear his words and see his gestures, more alive than ever. We would have had no other possibility of a true encounter with him other than that of the community that celebrates. For this reason the Church has always protected as its precious treasure the command of the Lord, "Do this in memory of me."

From the very beginning the Church was aware that this was not a question of a representation, however sacred it be, of the Supper of the Lord. It would have made no sense, and no one would have been able to think of 'staging' - especially before the eyes of Mary, the Mother of the Lord - that highest moment of the life of the Master. From the very beginning the Church had grasped, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that that which was visible in Jesus, that which could be seen with the eyes and touched with the hands, his words and his gestures, the concreteness of the incarnate Word - everything of him had passed into the celebration of the sacraments.

Christian faith is either an encounter with Him alive, or it does not exist.

The saving power of the sacrifice of Jesus, his every word, his every gesture, glance, and feeling reaches us through the celebration of the sacraments. I am Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man possessed by demons at Capernaum, the paralytic in the house of Peter, the sinful woman pardoned, the woman afflicted by haemorrhages, the daughter of Jairus, the blind man of Jericho, Zacchaeus, Lazarus, the thief and Peter both pardoned. The Lord Jesus who dies no more, who lives forever with the signs of his Passion continues to pardon us, to heal us, to save us with the power of his sacraments. It is the concrete way, by means of his incarnation, that he loves us. It is the way in which he satisfies his own thirst for us that he had declared from the cross. (John 19:28)

- Apostolic Letter (*Desiderio Desideravi*) paras 8-11 (29th June, 2022)