



SUNDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2021

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

The Feast of Christ the King (B): John 18: 33-37

“Never met a king”, Debbie said. “Read about plenty of them. I wasn’t impressed”.

Why do we use words that have messy connotations to describe Jesus? He admits of the title to Roman Governor Pontius Pilate - but his kingdom is of a different sort. It puzzled Pilate and we may feel it needs to be clearer for us all.

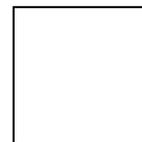
Jesus avoided attempts by the crowds wanting to express their adulation - “Realising that they were about to come and make him king, he withdrew to a mountain by himself” (John 6:15). The Gospel writers make it clear in their stories of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness (eg Matthew 4: 1-11) that he rejected any notions of worldly power and status. Kings and kingdoms were not his bag. On the contrary, he was emphatic to his disciples, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20: 25-28).

Our God re-writes the job description of kings and of leadership in general. It’s all about service.

There have been triumphalist periods in the Church’s history - we even call County Durham ‘The Land of the Prince Bishops!’ Some of those bishops did wonderful things for the poor and underprivileged, but the trappings of regal status are frankly out of place with a God who comes to serve and wait on us. This is a lesson to be learnt over and over by the Church, the community of his followers. Pope Francis opts for simplicity and reminds us we need to be a Church of the poor and for the poor.

The modern hymn ‘This is our God, the Servant King’ tries to keep the balance between the Lord’s unique status and his outright care for humanity. Far from seeking royal respect “He emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, and being in the likeness of his brothers and sisters, he humbled himself, being obedient unto death on a cross”. (Philippians 2:7). There aint many kings who’ve sacrificed themselves for their people and lived among them as he did.

Jesus loved people more than things. He came, the Way, Truth and the Life, to bear witness to the truth. In a world of fake news and hype, we have this feast to acknowledge the gift of love and service. To challenge all that is sham and showy, to hear all over again that the love we all need, is described and lived out by one who serves. He requires that his followers so understand this, that we’re not taken in by the inflated language of prestige and distinction, and dare to live and care in the real world that cries out for love and affirmation. Go for it.



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From Pope Francis

Love also impels us towards universal communion. No one can mature or find fulfilment by withdrawing from others. By its very nature, love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure that makes every periphery converge in a greater sense of mutual belonging. As Jesus told us “You are all brothers and sisters” (Matthew 23:8).

This need to transcend our own limitations also applies to different regions and countries. Indeed, “the ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today’s world make us powerfully aware of the unity and common destiny of the nations. In the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies and cultures, we see the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another”.

- *Fratelli Tutti* 95-96