



SUNDAY 22 OCTOBER 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

29th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 22: 15-21

We were discussing the traumatic news. Argument and counter argument, accusations and loyalties circulated on all sides. It was difficult to see beyond the blaming coming from so many quarters. Perceptions become personal versions of what we take for truth. It becomes wellnigh impossible to agree on one version except that of horrendous human tragedy and the loss of many innocent lives.

In the territories where Jesus walked, questions of power and control, were never far away from ordinary people. Winning wars of worlds could mean little in the face of military might. The Roman occupation army in Israel in Jesus' lifetime could bring destruction. Precarious peace and cautious alliances made for a careful balance and well-chosen words.

Jesus saw through the clumsy clockwork of the Pharisees and Herodians word-traps. His perceptive answers confounded the ambushes they laid for him. He operates from a very firm foundation - given to us in today's first reading "...from the rising to the setting of the sun apart from me, all is nothing" - God's message via Isaiah the prophet. The weasel words of crafty legal minds scoring points founder against the sovereignty of God. It's not to be messed with.

But our understanding of God comes to us covered in the fingerprints of all who have written and spoken about him. The God of the Pharisees and others appeared to be their possession—and with some preachers it may still seem to be that way. The God who sent his Son to us defies description save in the humanity and love shown to the poor - the hallmark of sound practice that measures wise government or its opposite.

Winning arguments and countering slogans in a war of words may be a political dance of importance in gaining supporters. The lives and safety of the innocent victims of war, however, engage our heartfelt understanding of a God of love and mercy who teaches a profound acceptance of human dignity that, whatever flags we fly, must be upheld always.



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Pope Francis on the poor

No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas. This is an excuse commonly heard in academic, business or professional, and even ecclesial circles. While it is quite true that the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice. "Spiritual conversion, the intensity of the love of God and neighbour, zeal for justice and peace, the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty, are required of everyone". I fear that these words too may give rise to commentary or discussion with no real practical effect. That being said, I trust in the openness and readiness of all Christians, and I ask you to seek, as a community, creative ways of accepting this renewed call.

- The Joy of the Gospel - para 201