



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 (A): Matthew 16: 13-20

Are you a people-watcher? Ever walked behind someone with a distinctive gait and wondered what he does for a living, what's his history? Been introduced to a new Jack or Jill and soon asked what they do for a living? Jobs, experience or skills paint a portrait - or do they? Identity is about more than this.

We make assumptions from people's looks, physiques, clothes and accents. We're assessing, doing detective work, needing to know. Curious or nosy, information seeks the truth. Trust and safety might depend on it. So who are you? Where do you come from? Where do you live? What do you do? What brings you here? I like to know.

Are you bothered or uneasy if people say 'I've heard a lot about you'? My instinct is to say 'Don't believe a word, good or bad'. The unspoken half of the sentence is 'make up your own mind'. None of us can be limited by other people's views. Reputations can be based on a single incident or comment. It may be second hand. It might not be accurate. You get the message? Really knowing people ain't easy. It takes time, is always incomplete, and yet it is important - a lot may depend on it.

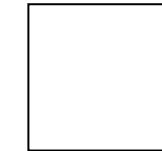
Jesus is crafty. His first question to his men is to ask about what others are saying about him. It's not threatening and they're quick to answer. Their replies will be stuff he already knows. Then he puts them on the spot. 'What about you? What do you say among yourselves when you talk about me?' It matters to him. How far have I got in how you understand where I'm coming from, and what it says about me? Put it into words. Say it to my face. Talk to me. I wonder how long the silence was.

Simon spoke up - like folks who don't cope well with awkward silences - and he blurted out what his heart told him about Jesus. It's direct, blunt even, not a subordinate clause in sight. "You are the Christ. The Son of the Living God." What??!!

Yes, they liked him. Were fascinated, mystified and challenged by him, but hadn't said something daring as this before. The Lord was delighted. From another human being he hears words that echo his Father's love. Simon has named him, nailed his identity.

So he now names Simon - you are the Rock. I'll build my community around you. Rock he wasn't, but had to become one. Leadership learnt in the doing of it, steered by grace. Jesus can now turn his face to Jerusalem and to the cruel drama of the Cross.

Here's a thought - what name does the Lord have for you when you tell him how you think about him? Tell him anyway. Thanks.



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More from Pope Francis

At times our media culture and some intellectual circles convey a marked scepticism with regard to the Church's message, along with a certain cynicism. As a consequence, many pastoral workers, although they pray, develop a sort of inferiority complex which leads them to relativize or conceal their Christian identity and convictions. This produces a vicious cycle. They end up being unhappy with who they are and what they do; they do not identify with their mission of evangelization and this weakens their commitment. They end up stifling the joy of mission with a kind of obsession about being like everyone else and possessing what everyone else possesses. Their work of evangelization thus becomes forced, and they devote little energy and very limited time to it.

It is striking that even some who clearly have solid doctrinal and spiritual convictions frequently fall into a lifestyle which leads to an attachment to financial security, or to a desire for power or human glory at all cost, rather than giving their lives to others in mission. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm!

(Paragraph 79 and 80 from 'The Joy of the Gospel')