



SUNDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

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## ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

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### 1st Sunday of the Lent (A): Matthew 4: 1-11

So what was Jesus like? The Gospels give us wonderful input and teaching but are tantalizingly short on much the curious mind wonders about.

What was it like to meet the Son of God in the very human Jesus of Nazareth? What did he actually look like? What was his voice like, how did he sound? Would I have liked to be held in his gaze? What would I like to have discussed with him and sought his response? The questions have no end and no answers.

But “he was tempted in every way that we are but did not sin” (Hebrews 4: 14-16). Totally human like us. He bled when he cut himself, got rightfully angry when he witnessed injustice, was great with kids and poverty stricken individuals and the sick. He stood up for people with no clout. He deeply felt for people - a God feeling that oozed compassion. A brother to us all and unlike any other.

Lent kicks off with stories of Jesus being tempted. What can we usefully learn for these weeks ahead? Since most of us think in pictures, Matthew’s Gospel graphics illustrate the tempting notions that cross Jesus’ mind. We all dabble with-possibilities, what-ifs, chancy fantasies that can entice and torment. Being the Son of God through the limitations of the human mind and body is a stunning gesture of love, coming to us through features we can understand. St Paul tells us that “he emptied himself and assumed the condition of a servant” (Philippians 2: 5-8).

Completely obedient to his Father, he came to show us how committed is our God to the care of his people. He is clear in making his choices - human choices, entirely consistent with being God among us.

Jesus comes out of the Gospel stories as someone who loves eating with people. Indeed, ultimately he himself becomes our food. But here in today’s Gospel he refuses to use his power to feed himself. He won’t do the spectacular thing for his own benefit. He’s a servant, preparing for his public ministry among the people of his time. So the tempting prospect is dismissed. He gets what he needs from every word that comes from the mouth of God. Nothing else compares.

The same word of God has priority for him over any dramatic, eye-catching leaps from heights, rejecting foolhardy antics requiring angelic support. But humans are always open to wild notions of material gain, even in dreams that compromise the highest standards. Riches also hold no attraction and are trenchantly discounted. The stories are brief, the message is enduring.

Our Lenten Gospel today invites us to scrutinise our thoughts, daydreams and fantasies and how they can turn our heads. Where do our minds go when we’re off duty? How often do we pick up our Scriptures, the word of God, allow Jesus to read them to us, and sit with his wisdom. Are you tempted to do that?



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### **Pope Francis on politics**

What is important is not constantly achieving great results, since these are not always possible. In political activity, we should remember that, appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love. Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life, that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God's faithful people. We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls and our hearts are filled with faces and names. The great goals of our dreams and plans may only be achieved in part. Yet beyond this, those who love, and who no longer view politics merely as a quest for power, may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force.

Viewed in this way, politics is something more noble than posturing, marketing and media spin. These sow nothing but division, conflict and bleak cynicism incapable of mobilizing people to pursue a common goal. At times, in thinking of the future, we do well to ask ourselves, "Why I am doing this?", "What is my real aim?" For as time goes on, reflecting on the past, the questions will not be: "How many people endorsed me?", "How many voted for me?", "How many had a positive image of me?" The real, and potentially painful, questions will be, "How much love did I put into my work?" "What did I do for the progress of our people?" "What mark did I leave on the life of society?" "What real bonds did I create?" "What positive forces did I unleash?" "How much social peace did I sow?" "What good did I achieve in the position that was entrusted to me?"

- *Fratelli tutti* paras 195-197