



SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2020

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

1st Sunday of Advent (B): Mark 13:33-37

Yes, the lockdown is tedious. Yes, we act responsibly and work at keeping ourselves and others safe, and we suffer the frustrations of seeing others apparently less caring. We're looking forward to seeing loved ones we've missed - we may have made preparations already. Part of us is focussed on the future, on hopeful days after vaccines have become available.

We blithely talk about Advent as a time of preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth - the stunning mystery and gift of God coming among us as one of us! We also nod in the direction of his coming again at the end of the world as we know it. Today's Gospel asks us to stay awake. What's going on?

We weren't alive when Jesus of Nazareth lived and worked, taught and healed in Galilee. His contemporaries expected his return before too long after his resurrection - indeed in their lifetime. So there was an urgency about living the upfront, honest life of a disciple so as to be ready for the Lord's coming. When it looked increasingly unlikely to be anytime soon, folks became less fervent, the urgency gone. Hence the message - not just about them but for us and for all time - stay awake, keep sharp, stay on the ball - it's easy to let things go.

Advent ain't just the countdown to Christmas. The news is right in our faces, "Now we watch for the day, hoping that the salvation promised us will be ours, when Christ our Lord will come in glory". To watch, we have to stay awake. Remember the account of Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper. Three times he asked Peter, James and John to stay awake and they didn't - they slept. If they can lose the plot so can we. We've heard the message before, but hearing it with a new insistence can make this year different.

COVID-19 has altered many of our usual patterns. Christmas and all it demands can pull us into detail that blocks the sense of urgency and attention to Jesus' coming in glory. We think it's miles away and we have more immediate demands. That's why we have this Gospel - "What I say to you, I say to all - stay awake". It could hardly be clearer.

To prepare the way of the Lord requires us to break out of ingrained patterns of church practice. Locked churches should have highlighted how our prayerfulness and readiness to deepen our contact with Jesus is a constant need you and I always have. We're today's disciples. It's not just about Sunday Mass, important though that is. Why not try explaining this to someone else and see how well and how personally you understand it? Thanks.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Pope Francis on Recovering Kindness

Consumer individualism has led to great injustice. Other persons come to be viewed simply as obstacles to our own serene existence; we end up treating them as annoyances and we become increasingly aggressive. This is even more the case in times of crisis, catastrophe and hardship, when we are tempted to think in terms of the old saying "every man for himself". Yet even then, we can choose to cultivate kindness. Those who do so become stars shining in the midst of darkness.

This can take different forms; an act of kindness, a concern not to offend by word or deed, a readiness to alleviate their burdens. It involves speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn.

Kindness frees us from the cruelty that at times infects human relationships, from the anxiety that prevents us from thinking of others, from the frantic flurry of activity that forgets that others also have a right to be happy. Often nowadays we find neither the time nor the energy to stop and be kind to others, to say "excuse me, pardon me, thank you". Yet every now and then, miraculously, a kind person appears and is willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference. If we make a daily effort to do exactly this, we can create a healthy social atmosphere in which misunderstandings can be overcome and conflict forestalled. Kindness ought to be cultivated; it is no superficial virtue. Precisely because it entails esteem and respect for others, once kindness becomes a culture within society it transforms lifestyles, relationships and the ways ideas are discussed and compared. Kindness facilitates the quest for consensus; it opens new paths where hostility and conflict would burn all bridges.

Fratelli Tutti paras 222-224