



SUNDAY 3 MARCH 2024

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

3rd Sunday of Lent (B) : John 2: 13-25

Wow! You could have heard the crash and the commotion! Crafty traders don't take kindly to their stalls being upended. Jesus was making a strong point - this wasn't a market place. It was a house of prayer.

Communication gurus call what Jesus did a 'symbolic act'. It claims your attention. It's a 'look here' gesture. There's an in-your-face message here, so take note.

We can appreciate the incident as an historical event. But to only see it like that is to miss a valuable lesson being driven home here. Apart from everything else we do and we get from our churches, they're places for the Body of Christ - that's us - to be intimate with our amazing God. They're places of prayer.

The buildings we call churches are the gathering places for the community of people we call 'The Church', to come and worship. Our parishes are meant to be communities and centres of prayer. Our church buildings are sacred places on our streets and on our estates. We come to these gathering places to celebrate Mass, to hear the Gospel, to be fed, sustained and sent out to serve the world in God's name. They're special places full of special stories.

In many a parish church there's a hubbub of talking before and after Mass. When I was a kid you didn't talk in church except to make any required responses to spoken prayers. But we like to see one another, to connect, to be part of a meaningful group, to feel some kinship with others who broadly share an outlook on life, to bond in praying, being united in Communion with the Lord and each other. We're social people. Our God is part of us and wants to express himself in and through us. Greeting and enjoying one another is about building community.

Talking establishes and feeds our relationships. Talking with God does the same. It needs time given to it. Time preferably free from other more mundane and even well-meant distractions. Jesus' words are always of the present - our churches and our focus are about him.

The feelings, the understanding and words that form the traffic between ourselves and God (that's all praying) are shaped, fed, encouraged and enhanced in our churches. Hopefully our churches are centres of welcome and safety, a quiet power in the wider community. The weekly Mass offered 'for the people of the parish' embraces every living being in our area. The holy souls who once sat in our benches are still part of us, helping in ways unknown to us.

The upheaval Jesus caused to highlight the importance of prayer shouldn't be lost on us. So now, especially in this Lent, what are we each doing about our praying? Is it personal, do we join others? Is it frequent, meaningful or casual? Thanking, requesting or praising? Jesus was passionate about prayer. We could well give it some thought this week. Shalom.



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Pope Francis on Spiritual Motivations

I cannot fail in this regard to remind the Catholic faithful of the motivations born of their faith. I encourage my brothers and sisters of other religions to do the same, since we know that authentic faith not only gives strength to the human heart, but also transforms life, transfigures our goals and sheds light on our relationship to others and with creation as a whole.

The Bible tells us , “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (*Genesis 1:31*). He is ‘the earth with all that is in it’ (*Deuteronomy 10:14*). For this reason, he tells us that, ‘the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. (*Leviticus 25:23*). Hence, ‘responsibility for God’s earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world’.

At the same time, the universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible richness of God. Hence, to be wise, we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships. Along this path of wisdom, it is not a matter of indifference to us that so many species are disappearing and that the climate crisis endangers the life of many other beings.

- *Laudate Deum paras 61—63*