



SUNDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 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

22nd Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 16: 21-27

We were having a discussion - or maybe it was an argument, about how well we know ourselves. Honesty was challenging. We decided to start far off, talk about characters that impressed us by their truthfulness. They normally suffered, wouldn't compromise or be economical with the truth. They spoke it like it is.

The Lord himself is the model of openness. Truth living among us. We can't fool him. He sees through us. Speaks openly and directly and never stops wanting to teach. Today's Gospel passage is startling. We shouldn't imagine it holds no message for us. If Jesus is blunt with Simon the Rock who has just impressed him, he needs to put us on hold too until we get the message. What's going on here?

In Matthew's Gospel narrative, Jesus delights in Simon identifying who Jesus really is. The Lord's teaching has had an effect, the message has got through to Simon. Now Jesus can turn his face to Jerusalem and prepare his small band of apostles for the brutal future that awaits him - and them too. Simon is appalled. In his mind the Son of the living God surely should go forward to a triumphant future. Jesus quickly stops him in his tracks. Simon has lost the concept of a suffering servant who spends himself and gives his life for his people, never colluding with injustice and identifying with the poorest.

There is no following of Jesus without the cross. Simon's well-meaning protection is tempting and temptation is Satan's insidious hallmark. It must be named for what it is. Simon must have been shattered. He's moved from being honoured to having his intentions totally denounced. To be called 'Satan' to his face was a moment he would never forget. I imagine Jesus needed to explain things to him later. He has more to learn about himself and his Lord.

So how well do we know ourselves? Do we skirt around the truth? Pretend, when we should get real? Convince ourselves that this or that is OK when it isn't and should be confronted? Self knowledge is not easy. Often it requires others to helpfully or crudely point things out, share some home truths.

Openness before the Lord of Truth who loves us but has no illusions about us is a clear requirement. We need to have no illusions about ourselves either. Fantasies can cheer us up for a while but not facing the truth diminishes who we are. We all need help to face harsh realities. Our mates are a godsend to help if they don't run away or distort or deny what's going on. Yes, it can hurt, but let's say again 'If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free' (John 8:31-32). Ask the Lord to be gentle in showing you more about the wonderful you.



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Pope Francis : Everything is connected

We can note the rise of a false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and a cheerful recklessness. Superficially, apart from a few obvious signs of pollution and deterioration, things do not look that serious, and the planet could continue as it is for some time. Such evasiveness serves as a licence to carrying on with our present lifestyles and models of production and consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices, trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending nothing will happen.

Laudato Si, paragraph 59

Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used.... The fact is that contemporary man has not been trained to use power well, because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience. Each age tends to have only a meagre awareness of its own limitations.

Laudato Si, paragraphs 104, 105