



SUNDAY 31 DECEMBER 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

The Feast of The Holy Family (B): Luke 2:22-40

I love Simeon and Anna, the two seasoned holy veterans, pillars of the Temple in Jerusalem. These wise and trusted individuals, a reassuring presence to many a visitor, one day witnessed something beyond a lifetime's hope. They held the anointed one of God in their arms.

Though unaware of their true role, they become an affirming homily to Mary and Joseph - two young, first-time parents with all the wonder, responsibility and inexperience of caring for their baby. Notice God's style here. Down to earth shepherds had previously also shared the support and message of angels confirming his identity and the importance of what was taking place, should Mary and Joseph have needed it. Simeon and Anna add more, and make perceptive comments about him. Every baby is important. The significance of Jesus is precious beyond words.

We all need affirmation and reassurance, the signals that who we are and what we're about is valuable and appreciated. What other language does God have in order to let us know we're doing a good job other than the encouragement of diverse individuals whose perceptions tell us so? Given the mind-numbing, unique calling of Mary and Joseph, their human need of support had to be yet greater. The life experience and prayer history in Simeon and Anna may have shown in their faces and their voices at their privileged share in this ritual presentation of Jesus the Lord in his temple. To have been a fly on the wall.....!

Jesus continues to appear in the vulnerable, the young, the elderly and the poor. These groups and more, interrogate our complacency, challenge our lack of observation and question what we do about it. We're all in a steep learning curve whether we're aware of it or not. Perceptive people carry a sensitivity we may lack. The distilled life experience of many an elderly person can shout to us if our mental acoustics are switched on. Their lives are heavy with events, achievements, losses, endurance and wisdom that may be beyond ours. Their experience of hardship, of carrying crosses, of hefty contributions to our world, are disguised in lined faces and declining health.

They need the gift of our time and attentiveness. We need to respect and give due recognition to their years. There's gold nuggets in their life stories and in what they would never have named as ministries in the untidy struggles of their lives. Remember Simeon and Anna. They could spot the Son of God.



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Pope Francis on equality

The mentality of maximum gain at minimal cost, disguised in terms of reasonableness, progress and illusory promises, makes impossible any sincere concern for our common home and any real preoccupation about assisting the poor and the needy discarded by our society. In recent years, we can note that, astounded and excited by the promises of any number of false prophets, the poor themselves at times fall prey to the illusion of a world that is not being built for them.

Mistaken notions also develop about the concept of 'meritocracy', which becomes seen as a 'merited' human power to which everything must be submitted, under the rule of those born with greater possibilities and advantages. A healthy approach to the value of hard work, the development of one's native abilities and a praiseworthy spirit of initiative is one thing, but if one does not seek a genuine equality of opportunity, 'meritocracy' can easily become a screen that further consolidates the privileges of a few with great power. In this perverse logic, why should they care about the damage done to our common home, if they feel securely shielded by the financial resources that they have earned by their abilities and effort?

In conscience, and with an eye to the children who will pay for the harm done by their actions, the question of meaning inevitably arises, "What is the meaning of my life? What is the meaning of my time on this earth? And what is the ultimate meaning of all my work and effort?"

-Laudate Deum paras 31 and 33