



SUNDAY 9 AUGUST 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

19th Sunday of the Year (A): Matthew 14: 22-33

Many of us were brought up to adopt a habit of examining our conscience last thing at night. The implication was we were to ask forgiveness for what we'd done wrong during the day. An earlier and now revived practice looks first with thanks for what went well and what was simply ok - how we served others as the Lord worked within us.

Today's Gospel passage has Jesus praying alone into the night with a head full of people after a day healing the sick and receiving their troubles. Soaking himself in the presence of his Father is a lesson for us all after the work of the day. To give thanks and to offload the sum and cost of what life required of us since we woke in the morning is vital and can be liberating. Sharing with the Father at night moves us to check in with him constantly during the day. We're doing his work. See it as a joint enterprise. The Spirit is given to inspire and sustain us for this.

But back to the Gospel story. In the fourth watch of the night - that's between 3 and 6 o'clock in the morning - Jesus leaves his prayer to re-join the disciples. (Don't miss how the length of his night prayer differs from ours). The story is a strong parable for us. It was and has been told often because its messages are timeless.

Have you ever felt all at sea? Have you felt you're in a vital struggle to keep your head above water? Has one wave of difficulty after another come at you relentlessly before you had time to deal properly with the last? Have your efforts felt futile against the incessant demands of responsibilities competing for your time? Does your own obvious competence seem useless in the face of the storm of difficulties that come in clusters and not one at a time? If so, this story of the fishermen disciples, experienced boatmen battling with a rough sea and a headwind, will sound familiar.

In the emerging gloom comes Jesus, doing the impossible, walking on the water. Like Peter, you want to go to him and he welcomes you. But the surrounding problems, the buffeting wind distract you and you take your eye off Jesus and back to the storm. Your cry for help is not only heard but expected and his reach holds you. You're not alone. The storm seems less and with a smile he asks why you doubted his presence.

You may well say that it's not always like that. That's why we have the story. It's about us now, not the men in that boat. In the dark hours and unlikely circumstances, we walk towards the Lord across the problems that have brought us to remember he's not far away and has been praying for us. Wrestle with the story. Give it your time. You've been there before.



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More from Pope Francis

At times greater emphasis is placed on the outward expressions and traditions of some groups, or on alleged private revelations which would replace all else, than on the impulse of Christian piety.

There is a kind of Christianity made up of devotions reflecting an individual and sentimental faith life which does not in fact correspond to authentic "popular piety". Some people promote these expressions while not being in the least concerned with the advancement of society or this formation of the laity, and in certain cases they do so in order to obtain economic benefits or some power over others.

Nor can we overlook the fact that in recent decades there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young. It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition. Growing numbers of parents do not bring their children for baptism or teach them how to pray. There is also a certain exodus towards other faith communities. The causes of this breakdown include: a lack of opportunity for dialogue in families, the influence of the communications media, a subjective outlook, unbridled consumerism which feeds the market, lack of pastoral care among the poor, the failure of our institutions to be welcoming, and our difficulty in restoring a mystical adherence to the faith in a pluralistic religious landscape.

(Paragraph 70 from 'The Joy of the Gospel')