



SUNDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2021

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 All Saints (B) Mark 12: 38-44

My cousin Harry is great fun. A family man through and through - and he's a passionate political activist. Harry goes on marches and demonstrations, writes to politicians, asks questions about standards and queries pat answers. I come away heartened from time spent with him - and I'm always challenged.

You'll be familiar with many of the issues. He's serious about the injustice of tax dodgers, whether they do it legally or otherwise. He delves into the complexities of multinationals - who actually owns what? He's furious about the duplicity of politicians who praise the NHS to the skies when they've seriously depleted it over the years. He's quick to take issue with public figures, ever seeking photo opportunities and handcrafting soundbites but not following up with real action. Like many of us, he thinks we're sleepwalking into an endangered future and doing nothing is not an option. Himself, he's as straight as an arrow - not perfect, but ready to admit it.

Jesus was a staunch critic of leaders in his own time. Today's reading tells us of those who regard themselves as a cut above others, believe they're superior, like to be seen as experts or pious people. They're narcissistic posers who have a dark side - swallowing the property of undefended widows. God is not fooled, and neither are we.

A common feature of our time is the imagined split between public and private life. The suggestion implies that as long as your public face and activity is ok, what you do in your private life, behind the scenes, is up to you and nobody's business. Has anyone noticed we're talking about the same person? Does transparency mean anything? We can't have two kinds of integrity.

Jesus demands genuineness. Authenticity requires there's no side to us. What you see is what you get. Leading a double life has its comeuppance in this world or the next. The poor widow in today's Gospel - you'll meet her one day - is a witness to selfless giving till it hurts. She's preaching a homily worth far in excess of the materially and financially well insulated publicity seekers.

The Lord says 'Beware'. Don't be taken in by attention grabbing individuals. Question what they're about. But have the courage and honesty to look at our own values and behaviour. That's harder. It's not difficult to spot unacceptable standards in others. But be open to the likelihood or possibility that we may be criticising in them what we find it hard to face in ourselves.

The mercy of God is amazing. We depend on it. It doesn't however excuse us from making our best effort, even when it's inconvenient. Do we play games by keeping well-in with people in significant positions and overlook or ignore others? Get real. This Gospel blows open this kind of posturing. Jesus sees through it. So must we.



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Pope Francis on the big picture

The specialisation which belongs to technology makes it difficult to see the larger picture. The fragmentation of knowledge proves helpful for concrete applications, and yet it often leads to a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationship between things, and for the broader horizon, which then becomes irrelevant. This very fact makes it hard to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today's world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor; these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests. A science which would offer solutions to the great issues would necessarily have to take into account the data generated by other fields of knowledge, including philosophy and social ethics; but this is a difficult habit to acquire today. Nor are there genuine ethical horizons to which one can appeal. Life gradually becomes a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence. In the concrete situation confronting us, there are a number of symptoms which point to what is wrong, such as environmental degradation, anxiety, a loss of the purpose of life and of community living. Once more we see that 'realities are more important than ideas'.

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic outlook. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic. To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system.

Laudato Si - paras 110-111