



SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER 2025

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

30th Sunday of the Year C Luke 18: 9-14

Today's famous parable gives us two messed-up individuals. They're both present in each of us. It's a pen portrait of the common humanity we share and perhaps struggle to recognise. The people of Jesus' time would be shocked at the praise given to the humble and hated tax collector over against the excessive religious practice of the smug Pharisee. But no one likes a bighead, God included.

Many years ago, a press photographer reminded me that we're all watching one another all the time. Trouble is that we tend to make comparisons and have a sliding scale of acceptability. 'Attitude' is a precious watchword – our own attitude first. It describes how we relate to God, as well – or as poorly – as we connect with others.

Jesus is a brilliant storyteller – and possibly a great mimic in how he described the characters in this clever tale. The Gospels link 'tax collectors and sinners' together – much to the annoyance of a taxman friend of mine! In Jesus' time, Jewish tax collectors worked for the Roman occupying army, and they had the reputation of lining their pockets with the extras they added to the going rate. We'll meet Zacchaeus, another tax collector, in next Sunday's Gospel. They were loathed. Their only friends were other tax collectors.

The self-righteousness of the Pharisee in our story leads him down the path of contempt for others who don't meet his superior standards. In his perfectionism and his personal piety, he's simply praising himself. Being self-absorbed, he sits in judgement on the tax collector and others like him. He scores an own goal with his prayer – it's not related to God but to his puffed-up self, and shows no solidarity with weak human nature. Love and justice are nowhere to be seen. Skills are for serving others, not for putting people down.

The tax collector has no illusions about himself. His body language and need for mercy is a stark gesture and an example of our sinfulness bringing us to God, hopefully as it should. We are dependent. Difference may indicate degrees of competence, but it matters how we show it. God is the source and focus of all things. Our neediness reminds us that we all have feet of clay and are here to make life possible for one another. You wouldn't buy a second-hand car from either of the characters in this story.

It does, however, highlight the importance of the penitential rite at the start of Mass. We come, hopefully not in a casual, routine way, but in all truth, knowing we don't always get things right. We emphasise our poverty and need, repeating 'Lord, have mercy', Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy'. If we manage to reflect honestly, these words should keep us grounded. This story is about me. It's about you. It's about all of us. It's worth hearing it again. Dare to go back to it. It still has more to say.



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Pope Francis on the environment

In the face of possible risks to the environment which may affect the common good now and in the future, decisions must be made based on a comparison of the risks and benefits foreseen for the various possible alternatives. This is especially the case when a project may lead to a greater use of natural resources, higher levels of emission or discharge, an increase of refuse, or significant changes to the landscape, the habitats of protected species or public spaces. Some projects, if insufficiently studied, can profoundly affect the quality of life of an area due to very different factors such as unforeseen noise pollution, the shrinking of visual horizons, the loss of cultural values, or the effects of nuclear energy use. The culture of consumerism, which prioritises short-term gain and private interest, can make it easy to rubber-stamp authorisations or to conceal information.

In any discussion about a proposed venture, a number of questions need to be asked in order to discern whether or not it will contribute to genuine integral development. What will it accomplish? Why? Where? When? How? For Whom? What are the risks? What are the costs? Who will pay those costs and how? In this discernment, some questions must have higher priority. For example, we know that water is a scarce and indispensable resource and a fundamental right which conditions the exercise of other human rights. This indisputable fact overrides any other assessment of environmental impact on a region.

Laudato Si—paras 184 & 185