



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

SUNDAY 18 JANUARY 2026

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

2nd Sunday of the Year (A) - John 1: 29-34

Harry is an actor. We had a long conversation about his drama training, but it all began when he took part in plays at school. He caught the bug and loved the applause. Learning the craft isn't easy, though the greats we see on stage, in films or on TV make it look so. And bad acting is awful.

Somehow our conversation got round to religious plays and films and how people portray Jesus. We moved on to how we imagine him in the first place because they're the shoes the actor will step into – or how the director of the project wants him to come across.

That conversation came to mind thinking about today's Gospel. What would it have been like to be John the Baptist? Can we ever get inside his mind? The Scriptures give us scant information, but what was he looking for and how did he interpret the signs that emerged when Jesus joined the line for baptism?

How do we understand things? There's no uninterpreted fact – we see, hear, feel something and we give it meaning. Now back to the Baptist. The Scriptures say that after Jesus came up from the water, the Spirit descended like a dove and came to rest on him and remained on him, and the Father's voice identified Jesus as his Son. So John now knows, but he wants to develop this further for us. Like the lambs sacrificed at Passover to atone for sins, John points out that Jesus is now the one who does that (Isaiah 53: 4). He never sought suffering but bore it on our behalf.

It's interesting that the Aramaic word for sheep (*talya*) is the same word used for servant. John the Baptist sees into the mission of Jesus. Servants meet need. As followers of Jesus the Servant, we are given the Spirit by him to care for others learning from his lead. You and I are public servants, here to serve those whose poverty and need call for intervention and compassion.

John is preaching to us as he preached to the people of his time. His job was to be a witness to the light so that we might believe (John's Gospel 1: 7). I love Auguste Rodin's sculpture of John the Baptist. It's simply a man standing up straight and pointing. We're the ones expected to follow the direction of his gaze. Like John, we need to 'come to recognise him' - a lifetime's business, not a once for all moment.

At each Mass we hear the word 'Behold' - that is 'would you just look!'. 'Behold the lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world' and blessed are we who are called to the supper of the lamb. We received the gift of God's Spirit at our baptism and are fed by the Eucharist. How we understand Jesus will affect our behaviour and thereby others may come to know him too. We're not actors – or are we? Shakespeare would suggest so. How we understand our role will shape and affect how we come across. I hear Oscars are rare.



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Pope Francis on Holiness

We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelising efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord's eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.

Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God's grace. For in the words of Leon Bloy, when all is said and done, "the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint".

- Rejoice and Be Glad paras 31 and 34