



SUNDAY 08 FEBRUARY 2026

Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

5th Sunday of the Year (A) - Matthew 5:13-16

The man on the radio described one of his neighbours as 'a standout individual', someone whose qualities, skills and kindness set her above the average. We started then to wonder whether in friendships, families, other organisations and companies, if survival and progress in the world might be due to other standouts who gave over the odds and made things so much more manageable.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus asks us to shine, to stand out – not by seeking attention but by choosing to give rather than take, to serve rather than feel entitled. Selflessness is a requirement – at the same time to be of help without losing oneself or being used at the will of others. Selflessness paradoxically walks hand in hand with a decent self-knowledge.

Years ago I came across a Snoopy card carrying the inside caption 'You do for me what sunlight does for stained glass windows!'. Sometimes we feel a whole room can light up when a certain individual enters. Jesus asks for more than the ordinary, or that the ordinary becomes recognisably special. It's not about personality, though that may help, but Gospel standout qualities centre on love, on caring, observation and commitment.

'Jesus went about doing good' (Acts 10: 38). We're carrying the L plates, still learning from the Light of the World who asks us to be his living body on earth, distinguished by the welcome difference and illumination we bring. It's a 24/7 enterprise. Last Sunday's Gospel passage of the Beatitudes signposts the hallmarks of his followers. These ways of living need a steady life of prayer to keep the engine running.

We're cautious today about our use of salt. But it has long been used as a preservative and it adds to the taste of food. Our being described as 'the salt of the earth' comes with the warning that if salt loses its saltiness then it has no other purpose. Its identity has gone. I do like the compliment – we are already this important stuff that can make such a difference, but if we don't live out our intended contribution to the world, there's no substitute. We haven't met the distinctive role that God has given us, and no one can take our place.

Matthew's Gospel goes on to give us pointers for being successful followers of the Lord and warns of various dangers to our faith. We all subscribe to a better world and perhaps too readily look to others to make it so. The call is made to every one of us to enhance our world, our communities and society by being light and salt. The Lord says we've got what it takes. Can we be brighter?!



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Pope Francis on the power of witness

I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in the elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence. We might call them "middle class of holiness".

Let us be spurred on by the signs of holiness that the Lord shows us through the humblest members of that people which "shares also in Christ's prophetic office, spreading abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity". We should consider the fact that, as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross suggests, real history is made by so many of them. As she writes: "The greatest figures of prophecy and sanctity step forth out of the darkest night. But for the most part, the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the most decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed".

- Rejoice and Be Glad—paras 7 & 8