



SUNDAY 22 MARCH 2026

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

5th Sunday of Lent (A): John 11 1-45

We've probably all met Marthas and Marys. There are many like them – perhaps including ourselves.

Here we have the fussy one, a doer, talkative and speaking her mind, contrasted with the quieter, deeper, reflective sister who's more of an attractive introvert. Maybe they're a good balance together. A tag match pair. Between them they'll miss nothing. They have a serious job – they are caring for their brother.

Did Lazarus have special needs? It's the sisters who seem to own the house – unusual at that time, the men had the ownership. Lazarus never speaks. Jesus used to visit them at Bethany. Who did he go mainly to see? We can speculate. Clearly he loved them all. But the message the sisters sent to him tugs at the heartstrings, 'Lord, the man you love is ill'. It seems he had a special place in his heart for Lazarus.

But of set purpose, Jesus chooses not to go. This is a sensitive one. Love has expectations. Martha and Mary both clearly think that a visit from the Lord would heal their sick brother Jesus meant so much to him. The decision Jesus makes would hurt and confuse. It appears out of character. The women can't disguise their disappointment. It seems they're somewhere between annoyance and quiet anger, grieving about more than the death of Lazarus. They're wounded by Jesus' delay. It doesn't make sense.

When he arrives they speak their pain. It hurts him too and he gives way to tears. He also asks for a greater trust. He's far from being heartless - there has to be something else going on. Can his arrival and the sight of him kindle a hope even yet that love can make something happen? Their assent to believing beyond death and loss that their friend will not let them down is rewarded by the stunning raising of Lazarus.

When we make requests of the Lord, serious and sensible ones and he doesn't respond, can we learn from Martha and Mary? Perhaps a trust we've not experienced before is being called for. Unlike the raising of Lazarus, it may be ourselves who may need to be unbound and let go free, released from our earthbound way of thinking. God isn't required to adopt our plans. It's never easy. Talk to Martha and Mary.



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Pope Leo on Love of God and love of the poor

Jesus' teaching on the primacy of love for God is clearly complemented by his insistence that one cannot love God without extending one's love to the poor. Love for our neighbour is tangible proof of the authenticity of our love for God, as the Apostle John attests: "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us...God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4: 12, 16). The two loves are distinct yet inseparable. Even in cases where there is no explicit reference to God, the Lord himself teaches that every act of love for one's neighbour is in some way a reflection of divine charity: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25: 40).

For this reason, works of mercy are recommended as a sign of the authenticity of worship, which, while giving praise to God, has the task of opening us up to the transformation that the Spirit can bring about in us, so that we may all become an image of Christ and his mercy towards the weakest. In this sense, our relationship with the Lord, expressed in worship, also aims to free us from the risk of living our relationships according to a logic of calculation and self interest. We are instead open to the gratuitousness that surrounds those who love one another and, therefore, share everything in common. In this regard, Jesus advises: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (Luke 14: 12-14).

Dilexi te : On Love for the Poor - paras 26 and 27.