



SUNDAY 29 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

Palm Sunday (A) - Matthew 21: 1-11 and 26:14 – 27: 66

We're beginning Holy Week, the greatest week of the Church's year. While we each have our ways of entering this week and celebrating it, can we appreciate all over again with wonder the extent God has gone to, and continues to go to, in order to save us from the self-incurred damage of our faults, mistakes and sins?

I am touched and can get emotional about people who put themselves on the line and give their lives for others. Listening to an old man recently about the woman he loves, he looked me in the eye and said simply and with energy, 'I would die for her' and then he said it again. It's unlikely that he'll have to go that far, but many have given their lives, suffered and worn themselves out in caring for others. Individuals have gone through rejection, torture and extreme brutality standing up for justice and the rightful dignity of all. There are saints and martyrs aplenty whose names we'll never know.

Our God cares for his daughters and sons. He doesn't sleep. Like an insomniac pacing the floor throughout the night looking after his people, aching to save, and that we might see by his active love how pitied and how treasured we are. During this week the Church lays on for us the final days on earth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. He also says, 'I would die for you' - and he does. The liturgies of this week walk us through the story, asking our accompaniment in the loneliness and pain of his Passion as it unfolds. We often feel for people. Feel with him in the events leading to the ultimate sacrifice and beyond.

We begin the week with palms, traditionally cherished and kept. But they also remind us of how we can quickly move from applause to condemnation. How our fickle and gullible natures can drop from the best to the worst of conduct like the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with palms and then shouted for his crucifixion a few days later. You may want to think of and even identify with St Peter who lied to save his skin, denying knowledge of the Jesus he loved. Or, have we ever, like the scribes and Pharisees, been a stirrer, encouraging others to vilify someone else?

Insight comes from hindsight. When we bring our personal or family story alongside that of the Gospel narrative and let the two run together, the one illuminates the other. This is a new year and we're different from where we were last year. Another year of living may give us a different sensitivity to words and events we've heard many times before. The God who pursued us into the flesh and became one of us, lived our human life with its limitations, its quiet and challenging times, doubts and risks, its laughter and pain, stresses and victories and an array of interesting relationships. What he did with his human life, how he was with others and how he was treated, has something to say to the way we live ours. In this Holy Week we learn again about life's demands and great costs and hopefully come to a new understanding that in the darkest times we are never alone because Jesus is with us – and he's been there before. Go gently.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Pope Leo on the suffering and compassion of the poor

Jesus' disciples criticised the woman who poured costly perfumed oil on his head. They said: "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor." However, the Lord said to them in response: "You always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me." (Matthew 26: 8-9, 11). That woman saw in Jesus the lowly and suffering Messiah on whom she could pour out all her love. What comfort that anointing must have brought to the very head that within a few days would be pierced by thorns! It was a small gesture, of course, but those who suffer know how great even a small gesture of affection can be, and how much relief it can bring. Jesus understood this and told the disciples that the memory of her gesture would endure: "Wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." (Matthew 26: 13). The simplicity of that woman's gesture speaks volumes. No sign of affection, even the smallest, will ever be forgotten, especially if it is shown to those who are suffering, lonely or in need, as was the Lord at that time.

Eight centuries ago, St Francis prompted an evangelical renewal in the Christians and society of his time. Wealthy and self-confident, the young Francis was taken aback by his direct contact with the poor and outcast of society. The story of his life continues to appeal to the minds and hearts of believers and many non-believers as well. It changed history. A further step on the same path was taken by the Second Vatican Council, as Pope Paul VI pointed out when he said that, "the ancient parable of the Samaritan served as the model for the Council's spirituality," I am convinced that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free of our self-centredness and open our ears to their cry.

Dilexi te - On Love for the Poor - para 4 and 7.