



SUNDAY 2 AUGUST 2026

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

18th Sunday of the Year (A) - Matthew 14: 13-21

I watch people going past to the shops every day. And at this moment a Tesco van is reversing outside here – deliveries to the flats next door are under way. Food. Its necessity, quality, price, preferences and variety take up a fair portion of our lives.

We hate wasting food, yet stats indicate mammoth wastage every year while, at the same time, millions are undernourished, starved of the vital nutrients and love that shape bodily and spiritual health. A friend of mine returned to his native USA after working abroad among radically poor and deprived people. After a first visit to his local supermarket he stayed away for weeks, horrified at seeing three aisles of dog food. The contrast with the hunger of the people he'd been serving really hurt him. And food poverty continues to exist in your street and mine.

Passages from Pope Leo's document *Dilexi Te* ('I have loved you') on the back page of this note are an insistent brief on the Gospel imperative to care for the poor, however we interpret how being poor expresses itself. This is not optional. It's the mind of God. Jesus ate with sinners and loved them – ordinary, fractured individuals, whose lifestyles raised eyebrows and spawned condemnations. His compassion for fellow human beings challenged the supposed good people of his time and does the same to us.

Today's Gospel is St Matthew's telling of the feeding of more than five thousand people. It's a story that says many things below and beyond the surface of the event. A tired Jesus reads the needs of the crowd and gives them priority over his and his apostles' downtime. Teaching and healing take up the day until his helpers and the crowd need something to eat before dispersing. But for Jesus, compassion brings responsibility. For us, doing something can seem to be someone else's problem. But what happened here? What would you have seen? Always go back to the text - no one says the loaves and the fish multiplied. Jesus raised his eyes to heaven, said the blessing and gave the food to the apostles who, in their turn gave it onwards to the people. Did those present do the same - brought out their food and shared it following Jesus' example?

It's a story of abundance, of our extravagant God. Begin with what you have, not what you lack. In the world of the Spirit, we do what we can. We share our limited resources. Here there are seven items of food and twelve baskets of leftovers. These are sacred numbers. There's more going on here than a miraculous feast. Our compassion is to humanise the world. Caring is a gift. Recipients of care may do likewise. Community can model this. Our Eucharist takes us into intimacy and responsibility. At the end of life's journey, no one wants to hear, 'You saw me hungry and did not feed me.'



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Pope Leo on religious communities serving the poor

Over time, Benedictine monasteries became places for overcoming the culture of exclusion. Monks and nuns cultivated the land, produced food, prepared medicines and offered them, with simplicity, to those most in need. Their silent work was the leaven of a new civilisation, where the poor were not a problem to be solved, but brothers and sisters to be welcomed. The rule of sharing, working together and helping the vulnerable established an economy of solidarity, in contrast to the logic of accumulation. The monks' witness showed that voluntary poverty, far from being misery, is a path of freedom and communion. They did not limit themselves to helping the poor: they became their neighbours, brothers and sisters in the same Lord. In the cells and cloisters, they created a mysticism of God's presence in the little ones.

In addition to providing material assistance, monasteries played a fundamental role in the cultural and spiritual formation of the humblest. In times of plague, war and famine, they were places where the needy found bread and medicine, but also dignity and a voice. It was there that orphans were educated, apprentices received training and ordinary people were taught agricultural techniques and how to read. Knowledge was shared as a gift and a responsibility. The abbot was both teacher and father, and the monastic school was a place of freedom through truth. Indeed, as John Cassian writes, the monk must be characterised by "humility of heart....which leads not to knowledge that puffs up, but to knowledge that enlightens through the fulness of charity." By forming consciences and transmitting wisdom, monks contributed to a Christian pedagogy of inclusion. Culture, marked by faith, was shared with simplicity. Knowledge, illuminated by charity, became service. Monastic life thus revealed itself as a style of holiness and a concrete way to transform society.

***Dilexi Te* paras 56 and 57**