



SUNDAY 23 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

21st Sunday of the Year (A) - Matthew 16: 13-20

If you're in the public eye, your reputation is up for grabs. Increasingly we hear of cruel comments, threats of harm and even of death, wished upon public and not so public figures by individuals hiding behind online anonymity. Thick skinned or not, good people can be worn down, put off, become hesitant or scared by likely or possible backlash in espousing various causes. Skin colour, nationality, faith or politics is enough to open the door to opposition and harmful invective. Reputations can be questioned, damaged and shredded unfairly if truth becomes a commodity or is replaced by just someone's preferences.

Slogans and soundbites, successful in the advertising world, characterise what we're about when there's not the time or the interest in detail. One-liners, especially carefully crafted ones, can be the brilliant truth or questionable substitutes. Gossip and the word on the streets are facts of life we live with and probably always have. In Jesus' time it was no different. His mission to spread God's kingdom required incessant preparation in prayer and imaginative communication in delivery, alongside his expressive love for people, especially the ordinary folk, the poorest and disregarded.

The Gospel passage given to us at Mass today, comes in part of Matthew's treatment of Jesus training his apostles. We have incidents in the Gospels when he was frustrated with the chosen group. They missed the point of things or were more interested in their own position and prospects than in the person and teaching of the Son of God. So he puts them on the spot. Starting with a general question about the gaff, about what folks are saying when he's not there. He knew all this, of course. But then he makes it personal – What about you? Who am I to you? There's eye contact here. Answers are needed. Who's going to speak first?

When he's working with his followers, with Simon or one of the others, he's working with me, with you. This here is not just reported speech. It's a conversation starter for ten. It's real engagement. He knew they talked among themselves about him – we must too – but here he wants them to tell him to his face. We must do that as well. Wonderful, impetuous and inspired Simon puts into words what he's not said to Jesus before. You and I have to do the same. Whatever we think and feel - and it will fluctuate - it matters that we say it. Not to worry if it's harsh - he accepts it, he's not insecure. But he wants to hear our voice.

It's important that those we love hear us say it. We are deeply loved by God and whatever the personal chat there is between us and the Lord, it matters. Jesus doesn't want a book answer. So Lord, on this day, this is what you mean to me... Honest.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP

Pope Leo on working with the poor

Addressing educators, Pope Francis recalled that education has always been one of the highest expressions of Christian charity: "Yours is a mission of obstacles as well as joys... A mission of love, because you cannot teach without loving" In this sense, since ancient times, Christians have understood that knowledge liberates, gives dignity, and brings us closer to the truth. For the Church, teaching the poor was an act of justice and faith. Inspired by the example of the Master who taught people divine and human truths, she took on the mission of forming children and young people, especially the poorest, in truth and love. This mission took shape with the founding of congregations dedicated to education.

Many female congregations were protagonists of this pedagogical revolution. Founded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Ursulines, the Sisters of the Company of Mary Our Lady, the Maestre Pie and many others, stepped in to the spaces where the state was absent. They created schools in small villages, suburbs and working-class neighbourhoods. In particular, the education of girls became a priority. The religious sisters taught literacy, evangelised, took care of practical matters of daily life, elevated their spirits through cultivation of the arts, and above all, formed consciences. Their pedagogy was simple; closeness, patience and gentleness. They taught by the example of their lives before teaching with words. In times of widespread illiteracy and systemic exclusion, these consecrated women were beacons of hope. Their mission was to form hearts, teach people to think and promote dignity. By combining a life of piety and dedication to others, they fought abandonment with the tenderness of those who educate in the name of Christ.

Dilexi Te paras 68 and 71