



SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 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

25th Sunday of the Year (A) - Matthew 20: 1-16

We can't go for very long before the subject of wages has a high place in the batting order of our news headlines. It might be about unequal wages for women doing the same jobs as men, or about the minimum wage, the living wage, rising or falling wage bills, various comparisons or vexed questions about bonuses. Justice, fairness, greed and passion all play well-rehearsed parts in this crucial topic.

So when Jesus tells the story of the workers in the vineyard each being paid the same for very unequal hours of work, there's a kickback from the workers who'd done a full shift through the heat of the day. We may well side with them. No matter how we understand the story, there's feeling here. We've heard that God's ways are not ours, that his generosity can take our breath away, and still have cause with the aggrieved workers. But hold on and consider - we're the ones in the story who came in last!

This is probably one of the most disliked and troublesome of all Jesus' stories. He comes to preach the kingdom of God. It's different. We're being deliberately challenged because our values don't square with Jesus' message. Letting him be God doesn't come easy to us when we have a gut feeling that we wouldn't have done things that way. There are people who we feel don't deserve being treated so generously. But in fact, we don't either.

The Lord's stance can shock 'the good guys', including ourselves, and it's meant to. Our God loves and guides his Church but is not bound by it. Those who might be last have a chance to be considered the first. Individuals outside the Church's structures can be an example to us. We never know another person's full inside story but God does. Jesus' surprising appearance looks out at us through the eyes of the poor, the sick, the imprisoned and the hungry people who surround us. We tend to judge, but it's only the Lord who is qualified, who has the complete picture.

The God who joined us in our human frailty is more loving, more forgiving, more compassionate, more just and greater than anything we can ask or imagine. Honestly, we rely on it. Jesus piles story upon story to build our grasp of a Father God who cherishes his children, sinners though they be. The Lord never stops teaching and continues now. When we pray 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', we are the very people who have to do it. I put both hands up - we still have a lot to learn about love and generosity.



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP

More from Pope Leo on Love for the Poor

The acceleration of technological and social change in the last two centuries, with all its contradictions and conflicts, not only had an impact on the lives of the poor but also became the object of debate and reflection on their part. The various movements of workers, women and young people, and the fight against racial discrimination, gave rise to a new appreciation of the dignity of those on the margins of society. The Church's social doctrine also emerged from this matrix. Its analysis of Christian revelation in the context of modern social, labour, economic and cultural issues would not have been possible without the contribution of the laity, men and women alike, who grappled with the great issues of their time. At their side were men and women religious who embodied a Church forging ahead in new directions. The epochal change we are now undergoing makes even more necessary a constant interaction between the faithful and the Church's Magisterium, between ordinary citizens and experts, between individuals and institutions. Here too, it needs to be acknowledged once more that reality is best viewed from the sidelines, and that the poor are possessed of unique insights indispensable to the Church and to humanity as a whole.

The Church's Magisterium in the past 150 years is a veritable treasure of significant teachings concerning the poor. The Bishops of Rome have given voice to new insights refined through a process of ecclesial discernment. By way of example, in his Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII addressed the labour question, pointing to the intolerable living conditions of many industrial workers and arguing for the establishment of a just social order. Other popes also spoke on this theme. St John XXIII, in his Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961), called for justice on a global scale: rich countries could no longer remain indifferent to countries suffering from hunger and extreme poverty; instead, they were called upon to assist them generously with all their goods.

Dilexi Te paras 82 and 83