



SUNDAY 4 OCTOBER 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

27th Sunday of the Year (A) - Matthew 21: 33-43

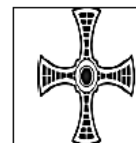
We were having a lunch break, sandwiches out and time to enjoy the banter among pals. Some time during the usual mix of light-hearted and serious opinion, someone said, 'Hey, it's so easy to become grumpy old men!' Big laughs of recognition and grins all round. We're all commentators. They say that any match in the Football League will have twenty thousand or more referees – heaps of armchair critics who reckon they could do better blindfolded.

The prophets God sent before Jesus faced criticism and more. Disagreement led savagely to elimination. Opposition to God's messengers by chief priests and leaders of the people showed that they were intent on control and not service. 'Vineyard' was the Jews' favourite description of themselves, but greed and possessiveness had soured any sense of genuine leadership. Position and power had ceased to enable welfare and growth and had led to self-serving and domination.

Jesus' parable was delivered to the religious leaders of his time. If we leave the story there, then we've failed to see that it's meant for us too. Leadership that diminishes others, self-righteous behaviour that claims ownership, action that claims to be right just because I do it, are features of what we now call spiritual abuse. Personal profit and interests cripple the community. Jesus' message confronts injustice, challenges us to recognise our selfish and closed attitudes and identify personal prejudices. There's no such thing as victimless crime, we say. Our actions have consequences, always.

The Lord shared the same fate as the prophets. His death on the cross places Jesus in solidarity with all innocent victims - prisoners of conscience, refugees, people whose human rights are suppressed, the poor and those who are exploited. But the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Resurrection has shattered death and destruction. Jesus saves. He comes to share our frailty and free us from the self-harm of our sins, teaching us to shun acquisition and greed, and to recognise that none of us is superior to another. Jesus washed feet, came to serve, mixed and ate with sinners and those labelled and ostracised. The affairs of religion should not overtake time owed to working for justice and integrity. Our strength lies in weakness. The only race is the human race. We're here to make life possible for one another.

The self-absorbed leadership that killed the prophets and Jesus shows a powerful picture of a humanity that has lost its bearings, corrupts able people and harms the most vulnerable. We're here to learn from these well-crafted stories. Father...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.



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More from Pope Leo on the place of the poor in Church teaching

Pope Francis recognised that in recent decades, alongside the teachings of the Bishops of Rome, national and regional Bishops' Conferences have increasingly spoken out. He could personally attest, for example, to the particular commitment of the Latin American episcopate to rethinking the Church's relationship with the poor. In the immediate post-conciliar period, in almost all Latin American countries, there was a strong sense of the Church's need to identify with the poor and to participate actively in securing their freedom. The Church was moved by the masses of the poor suffering from unemployment, underemployment, unjust wages and sub-standard living conditions. The martyrdom of St Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, was a powerful witness and an inspiration for the Church. He had made his own the plight of the vast majority of his flock and made them the centre of his pastoral vision. The Conferences of the Latin American Bishops held in Medellin, Puebla, Santo Domingo and Aparecida were also significant events for the life of the Church as a whole. For my part, having served as a missionary in Peru for many years, I am greatly indebted to this process of ecclesial discernment, which Pope Francis wisely linked to that of other particular Churches, especially those in the global South.

Dilexi Te para 89