



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for Advent Sunday (30th November) 2025

In the old Requiem Mass, one of the most captivating texts was the *Dies Irae*, the opening line of which was translated in Anglo-catholic and other circles, "Day of doom and wrath impending." In choral settings of the Mass such as those of Verdi or Mozart, the drama of the music ensures that it is often the best remembered bit. However, it was hardly a comforting sentiment for those grieving the loss of people they loved. The text was removed in the revisions as the focus of the Mass shifted from judgement to Salvation and the hope of Resurrection. This was a pity in one regard, since the plainsong of the words was also memorable. A humble and self-effacing priest, therefore, set what are sometimes termed the *Easter Anthems* to the melody and we sing it here as the *Gradual* at Requiems.

People very often view what is sometimes called the *Day of the Lord* - or the *Consummation of the Age* - as this time of wrath and doom. The implication is that we approach the Day of Judgement with trembling, convinced that even the best of us will only pass its test by the skin of our teeth and the rest - well Mediaeval artworks tell us what will happen to them.

However, if we read the words of Isaiah, which comprised the first reading this morning, we infer a rather different conception of the *Day of the Lord*: one which is not so much dominated by judgement, but by the perfecting of human society. The enmity, which divides peoples and individuals will be swept away; we shall share a Faith - a knowledge of the one God and His sovereignty over all of creation. The issues, which cause conflict between us will be dissolved and we shall walk in the Light of the Lord, living according to the precepts of His love, Truth and Justice.

This, I would suggest, must be an enticing prospect - not least in our own fractious times; and so, we might wonder, why would we view it with trepidation?

The answer must lie in the fact to which Jesus refers in the Gospel that the moment will take us unawares: life will be rolling on much as ever, when suddenly providence will foreclose on routines of earth existence. As Saint Paul suggests in the Epistle, those habits are infused with attitudes and choices, which are part of what will be swept away. Perhaps many will take comfort in the references to drunken orgies, confident - in most cases - that these do not form part of their worldly experience. In selecting them of his list, Saint Paul was doubtless reflecting his view of the things, which corrupted human society, alienating it from God.

His citing of wrangling and jealousy probably resonates more clearly down the generations with everyday experience. Both of these are obviously antithetical to the nature of the *Day of the Lord* as prophesied by Isaiah, militating as they do against the social harmony necessary to secure his vision of those times.

Of course, there are some - maybe many - who are not prey to the lures of wrangling and jealousy. However, even for them the situation is not as simple as it might initially seem. Wrangling and jealousy are significant influences in our world and even those who eschew them in their individual dealings must navigate their way through a world where such attitudes are prevalent. The knowledge and presence of them around us influences the choices we make. Even for the most irenic, the dawning of the *Day of the Lord* will introduce an unfamiliar context and we shall all have to adapt to a time wherein social peace is not only dominant, but the governing principle on which all life is based.

The fact, as asserted in the Gospel, that this moment will creep up on us unawares, warns us that we need to reflect even now on those perspectives and decisions we make and how they are beholden to the sinful aspect of the world in which we live. We might discover that a perfected society strips away elements of our life with which we are not only familiar, but comfortable. The transition inherent in the dawning of the *Day of the Lord* might well be characterised by struggle even for those, who suppose that they are impatient for its arrival.