



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

### Homily for Aidan Evans's Golden Jubilee (9<sup>th</sup> September) 2023

One of the unexpected turns in my life of recent times has been the development of an interest in the art of streaming services. In an attempt to broaden our skills, I survey various favoured liturgical establishments to see what they do. A while ago, I noticed that one cathedral includes in the subtitle of the Capitular Mass that during the Eucharist, the Church, "Re-lives the Last Supper, where Jesus took bread and wine and said they had become his Body and his Blood." I would guess that the brevity of this statement belies the considerable thought the authors put into its formulation as they attempted to say something substantial whilst foreclosing on the potential for irate e-mails complaining that they had sold out to Roman Catholic identity - like the ones we get from time to time - though goodness knows why.

As far as it goes the statement is fine and probably appropriate to its purpose, but it is not the whole story. Whilst the form of the Mass is found in the past historical event of the Last Supper, its power, so to speak, what gives it life comes from the future - or, more accurately, from the eternal realms where that future is already realised. In the Mass we enter into a glimpse of that New Heaven and New Earth as the New Jerusalem comes down out of Heaven.

This metaphysical dimension of the Eucharist is somewhat neglected in societies awash with a certain sort of constraining rationalism, which wishes to focus on what we can see and master and control. Despite our focus on what Rowan Williams once described as the neuralgic issues of contemporary ecclesiastical politics, in fact, sustaining this mystical dimension of our Faith in the face of the philosophies around us is one of the profound challenges of mission in our day.

Yet, it is within the context of this mystical experience that music finds what I recently read described as its non-negotiable place in the Liturgy. Music transfigures the experience of participation in the Eucharist, lifting it from the mundane character of daily discourse. You only have to imagine how different *Rejoice! The Lord is King* would have been if, instead of singing it, we had recited it in a spoken voice.

Music has the capacity to articulate what the spoken word cannot; it can hint at the Mystery around us; it can raise or lower the intensity of the moment giving shape to the rite as it unfolds. It provides a common medium around which the disparate members of a congregation can coalesce, strengthening the *communio*, which should underpin our gathering.

Matching and fitting music to the Liturgical purpose is not as easy as it might seem, not least since a particular context is an important consideration in what is provided; Liturgical musicianship is a skill and expertise in its own right, able to distinguish between music during the Liturgy and music of the Liturgy.

This, however, is different from the fear that we might make a mistake. As with the life of discipleship in general, we will falter from time to time. Whilst, of course, it behoves us to give of our best, the perfect musical performance may not be quite the same thing as the authentic Liturgical offering. As was said in the now long-forgotten report, *In Tune with Heaven*, parishes should not shy away from music for fear that its rendition would be less than musically excellent.

Music, like the Mass itself, is a gift from God; and it finds no higher purpose than helping us to lift our hearts to our Lord God that we might encounter the Presence of the risen Christ in our midst and glimpse the goal on which our hope is set: the perfect and perpetual union with Him Who made us in the New Jerusalem.