



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

Homily for Christ the King Sunday (23rd November) 2025

There is a moment in the Gospel reading when we are almost transported back to Jesus' experience of temptation in the wilderness. The suggestion offered by the character popularly identified as the bad thief that as the Christ - the Messiah - our Lord should save Himself - and, indeed, the two being crucified Him from their fate echoes the threefold attempt by Satan to lure Jesus to abandon His God-given role in the face of the price that He would have to pay.

It is a temptation that many of us encounter over the course of our lives: that when we are faced with a cost to doing the right thing, we wonder whether we are willing to stick with the cause of righteousness. Satan, fulfilling an earlier role, makes just this point when he is discussing the virtue of Job: to paraphrase his argument, he asserts that it is easy enough to lead a good life when we are blessed with prosperity; but rather harder when adversity strikes. Yet, it is in those times of adversity that our commitment to our discipleship is tested.

This is not to say that there is a one-size-fits-all-circumstances set of rules, which constitute the path of righteousness. Different contexts may and often do require alternative codes of conduct for us to achieve our Christian purpose: and it is that purpose, which is key to righteousness rather than particular patterns of response to the people and world around us.

At the primary level, that purpose is that we should manifest something of the character of the divine in our dealings: His love and His compassion, but also His Truth and His justice. It can be challenging for us to determine how we hold together these different aspects of the divine character; truth and justice can seem to pull in a different direction from love and compassion; but equally love of one can seem to compete with love of another - or, indeed, love of the rest.

As we seek to reconcile these apparently rival claims on our discipleship, we must resort to the deeper purpose, which underlies them: the Salvation of souls. It was, after all, for this that Christ died. The underlying purpose of our discipleship is to enable ourselves and others to escape the grip of this world and be reconciled with our Maker.

Whilst, perhaps - though not invariably - people might be prepared to bear the cost of their own Redemption in terms of the choices they must make, it is much harder to follow the path of Christ and pay that price for others. When love or compassion or standing for the cause of unpopular truth and justice confront us with a burden to ourselves, the temptation can be simply to walk away.

Yet, we need to remember that our own Redemption cannot be separated from that of others so easily. In the first part of the Gospel reading, we are reminded of the inscription nailed to Christ's Cross identifying Him as the King of the Jews. This draws into our reflexion the exchange with Pilate where Jesus notes that His Kingdom is not of this world.

In this otherworldly Kingdom, it is not, as it were, a legitimate choice for Jesus to forsake His predicament, because it is not simply for Him that He undergoes the Sacrifice, but for all of us. In the Kingdom of God, the good of one and the good of all are inseparable.

The *diakonia* - the service - of our discipleship as aspiring subjects of the Kingdom of God, whilst manifested in our relationships with other people is ultimately rendered not to them but to God; and is part of His Purpose of reconciling them with Himself: not just through attention to individuals, but by creating a context in which that Purpose may flourish: bringing His Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.