



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

### Homily for Easter VII (17<sup>th</sup> May) 2026

In Agatha Christie's novel, *A Murder is announced*, Miss Marple muses on the problem of knowing who people actually are in days of increased mobility. Once, she observes, in a place like Saint Mary Mead everyone had lived there for years - decades - generations; and if a new person did move to the village, they would bring letters of introduction with them. However, by the time she was speaking, all of this had changed and the long-time population was interwoven with a cohort of new arrivals, who were unknown strangers.

She was speaking, of course, before the development of the internet. Nowadays, quite often, you can a name into the Google and find out all that you might need to know. The problem now is frequently not too little information, but too much. Most of the time, you cannot be sure who is actually the author of what you are reading and how accurate it is even if it has been written by the person her or himself.

However, there is a more profound issue, which unites the internet and Miss Marple's letters of introduction: both provide second-hand information; and whilst the biographical facts, when they are facts, might be unchangeable, the opinions and analyses represent one person's experience at a particular time and in a specific context. What is more, you need to know in the quality of whose opinions you can have confidence.

When it is important to know someone, there always comes a point when you need to move beyond the reports to a direct engagement with her or him and find your own estimation of his or her qualities and character.

For Christians, this is as true of God as it is of other people. The reports of God that we have in the Bible and the writings of our forebears in the Faith, insofar as they provide us with an accurate picture, can only ever take us part of the way. Only we can discover the full significance of God, His Will and Purpose, in our particular situation.

Again and again in the Gospels - particularly in Saint John's oeuvre - we are told that the avenue to engagement with God is through encounter with the risen Christ. At one point, He says of Himself, "To have seen Me is to have seen the Father."

In the Gospel reading today, He says in His High Priestly Prayer addressed to God, "I have made Your Name known to those You took from the world to give Me." In speaking of God's Name, He refers to more than simply to the word by which we identify God. In the thought of the time, in the name inheres God's identity. It is for this reason that Jews are forbidden to utter God's Name. However, in the context of the Renewed Covenant, the veil has been rent by the Incarnation and God has revealed Himself to us in Christ.

Of course, we shall never know God in His entirety: none of us is capable of such breadth of perception to grasp the infinity of His character, Will and Purpose; but through the risen Christ we can at least begin to know God as His Presence relates to the circumstances of our own lives: our choices and actions.

Despite the contemporary fashion for "friending" almost anyone, over whose internet presence we might perchance stumble, we cannot really say that we know someone simply from their biographical details and the opinions of others: we must meet them face-to-face and develop our own association with them. It is in making the leap from simply relying on second hand experiences - no matter how venerable - to seeking out knowledge through a direct encounter with God in Christ that we breathe life into our Faith in Him.