



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

### Homily for Lent III (8<sup>th</sup> March) 2026

During his interrogation of Jesus, Pontius Pilate famously asked, somewhat rhetorically, "What is truth?" Interestingly, it is probably a question more cogent to the modern mind than it would have been to the first readers of the Gospels.

Truth is one of those concepts, which people often suppose is quite simple, but which, in fact, is fraught with complexity. If you are required to give evidence in some formal situations, you will be required to affirm that you will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth or some similar formulation. The import of such an undertaking is not only that you will not lie, but that you will not seek to deceive by only partially answering the question of hiding some aspect of the full answer behind a wall of carefully chosen words. For the most part, in such circumstances you are being asked to recall facts and events, which you have witnessed. However, in fact, Truth is more than facts.

Truth has to do also with the interpretation and evaluation of those facts. I might say that I saw Clementine taking a book from the shop without paying for it, this was stealing and stealing is wrong; therefore, Clementine did a bad thing. However, only the first of those statements is necessarily true: Clementine might have been entitled, for one reason or another, to take the book and so was not stealing; and if she was stealing, it is only an opinion, even if a widely held one, that stealing is wrong; and, indeed, from time to time, people advance arguments why a greater principle renders the theft acceptable behaviour.

Furthermore, even what we suppose to be facts are not always so. The police will tell you that witnesses to incidents are notoriously unreliable and when a number of people are asked to describe the person they saw, very often they appear to have seen three different individuals.

The search for truth is filtered through our perceptions and experiences; and because these are all different, we can, each of us, come up with differing understandings of what the truth of a particular situation might be. In recent times, this has given rise to notions of *my truth* and *your truth*, which might be incompatible propositions, which just have to sit side by side. Truth is deemed a subjective phenomenon.

Christians, whilst acknowledging that the search for truth is bedevilled by the influences of how we view the world, none-the-less believe that there is *the Truth* - an objective assessment of the world and its history: this is the opinion, so to speak, which emanates from the mind of God; and it is part of our task to find this perspective: to learn to see the world and the people who live herein as God sees them. Saint John's Gospel reports Jesus as promising that the Spirit will lead us into all truth.

It is for this reason, that the Christian search for Truth is never an individual and personalised endeavour, but one which is undertaken within the context of the Christian community. In the first place, of course, our separate points-of-view are challenged by the culture of Liturgical prayer and the influence of Christ's Presence in our midst; but more than that, the multiplication of perspectives being brought to bear on a question tilts our search a little towards the omniscience, which informs the infinite perspective of God's own judgements. We are searching not for *my truth*, but *our truth*; and under God's guidance through the work of the Spirit, we feel our way towards God's Truth - the Truth, which is as objective as the facts we seek to interpret.

Of course, a Christian community - even at the macro level of the Church Universal - does not get close to the infinite perspective of the divine mind. There is always the possibility of more to be known: our search for Truth is only ever a work in progress in this world; but it is a work in which we are called to engage - not simply as individuals, but in collaboration with our fellow Christians.