



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

Homily for the Low Sunday (12th April) 2026

I might have mentioned previously that when I circulated my Ordination card detailing the date when the then Archbishop of York proposed to make me deacon, Father Richard Knowling, the Director of Pastoral Studies at Mirfield, commented that he could not think of a less suitable day for me to be ordained than the feast of Doubting Thomas. Even at the time, I had a suspicion that it was a more nuanced comment than the unqualified compliment on the solidity of my faith that I chose to construe it to be.

Nearly forty years later, the comment still has cogency, but - or so, at least, I like to think - the nuances are a little different. Forty years of thinking and talking about the tenets of the Catholic Faith have left me as certain of them as I was then. However, between then and now, I have wandered down the side-streets of uncertainty as these great truths hit up against the realities of life as I pursued my priestly discipleship in the parishes where I have served. Nor do I discount the possibility that there will be more detours before I reach the end of the road.

One of the things I have had to understand is that there is an inevitable tension for Christians, who are called by God simultaneously to live from the future consummation of His Will and Purpose whilst contending with the life of the world in its still regenerating stage. The practice of an incarnational Faith - one that is embedded in and engages with the world around it - is an inevitably untidy exercise.

However, it is not sufficient simply to acquiesce in the muddle: we should not aspire solely to live in two different worlds - one for every day and one for church. Recent generations have developed the notion of a religion that is practised in private, leaving what is called the public realm a supposedly neutral space - though it is, in fact, nothing of the sort. Secularism has its own metaphysical truths every bit as much as religious belief.

We need not to see the world and our faith as parallel paths, but converging tracks, which lead to us to the point where our faith has absorbed our earthly experiences and our perceptions of the world reflect the tenets of our faith. To be sure, this will only ever be a work in progress this side of the grave; but it is a task, which must be progressing.

One of the pressures, which we increasingly encounter, is to permit faith to retreat in the face of worldly experience. It is argued that the empirical evidence of the world as popularly interpreted at any given moment trumps any philosophy emanating from an unseen source.

However, in response we might make three points.

First, what we think we see of the world is not always what is actually there. Academics and scientists routinely re-visit the once apparent certainties of previous discoveries; and the interpretation of empirical data is an art not a science.

Secondly, few people would argue that the world as it is is how it should be, even if we differ as to how it should be improved.

Thirdly, the fact that we do not see God in the same way that we see the person sitting next to us does not mean that we have not experienced His Presence. There is much more to creation than what we can reach out and touch.

Saint Thomas was fortunate, because it suited the divine Purpose for his doubts to be resolved in short order. However, to paraphrase the words of Jesus: "Blessed are they, who must live with the worldly pressure to doubt and yet believe."