



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

Homily for Maundy Thursday (2nd April) 2026

In the first of the *Downton Abbey* films, we meet Lady Maud Bagshaw, Lord Grantham's cousin, who, far from uniquely, has an embattled relationship with the dowager countess, the earl's mother. In a scene from the second film, as she responds to the news of some thoughtful kindness shown by the older Lady Grantham to her great granddaughter, with the comment that even Genghis Khan loved his family. I am not sure that this was true - certainly not in any meaningful way - but the line came to mind a few Saturdays ago, whilst I was in the town.

At the Monument that day, there was one of those frequent events reacting to events unfolding in our nation and around the world. As proceedings got underway, the impresario announced that this was a message of love and inclusion, before reciting a fairly lengthy list of people and groups, who were not welcome on the streets of our city. I am guessing that quite a lot of the people passing by at the time were not feeling the love.

I found myself reflecting that the character of love being promoted was one heavily influenced by the humanity from which it was offered. In human hands, so to speak, love responds to particular qualities in another: kindred, attraction or a shared outlook on life; and when this is the case it differs from the character of love, which touches our lives in its pristine state.

It is tempting to draw a complete distinction between divine love and human love; but that would be misleading. All love ultimately emanates from the heart of God. However, often, may be always to some extent, when that love is mediated through a human heart, its qualities can be changed rather in the same way that the qualities of chemical elements can be changed when combined with other elements.

The pristine unmediated love of God does not respond only to certain types of people, but embraces them simply for their being - just because they exist: whereas human love responds to something in or about another, divine love embraces a person merely for her or his humanity.

This all-embracing love is beyond the capacities of most people on earth; our human frailty serves to frustrate the character of divine love to a greater or lesser extent. Yet, as with so many things, the fact that we cannot attain perfection does not mean that we need not seek to work towards it. Every time we hear of God's love, every time we encounter it in our own lives, we should feel the discomfit of its juxtaposition with the love that we experience and show to others.

In all of this, one of the things that we have to bear in mind is that there are always two sides to a loving relationship - the one who loves and the one who is loved. As well as appreciating the qualities and circumstances of the people we *do* love, we might wonder what it is about ourselves that makes it difficult for us to love particular others: how our attitudes and perspectives serve to filter the love that flows from the heart of God, withholding it from some.

The challenge for us is to learn increasingly to restrain the partiality of our human frailty so that through us the love of God can encompass an ever wider circle of people. As we shall hear in a moment or two, it is in this way that the Presence of God in the world can be manifested - Where charity and love are - there is God.