



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

### Homily for Pentecost (24<sup>th</sup> May) 2026

As I have recently had cause to observe to one, who is preparing to be baptized here next week, there are two representations often used in Christian art to denote the Presence and Work of the Holy Spirit: a dove and flames of fire. Both, of course, are rooted in the New Testament texts: the dove appears in the narrative of Jesus' Baptism and, as we have just heard, the tongues of flame are mentioned in Saint Luke's account of the Day of Pentecost.

Of course, both images have other associations. The dove is also a symbol of peace - quite often a bevy of doves is released when people want to assert either that peace has been attained in a particular situation or that it is desired. So far as the flames of fire are concerned, we often speak of a burning passion when we want to emphasise a great intensity to someone's aspiration of commitment.

Yet, so often, these two qualities - peace and passion - seem to be uneasy bed-fellows. In our own day, there is a notion that the communication of passion is heavily seasoned by anger fuelled by resentment of one sort or another.

Anger brings its own agenda to a debate. It can distort our perspectives, obscuring the path to a resolution of whatever it is that discomfits us; it stifles the reasonableness, which enables us to find a practical way forward. Anger can make of those with whom we differ, ogres to be vanquished at any cost.

Furthermore, anger can be reluctant to abate: even when an issue or cause has run its course, the anger lingers, just waiting for an opportunity - any opportunity - to resume the hostilities: often by latching onto some other issue.

The Christian perspective is that nothing is ever settled until we find peace: and a peace, which is more than restraining latent hostility, leaving like caged wild animals roaring at the bars of their prison, just waiting for the change to escape their captivity and wreak violence. True peace is not an absence, but a presence; the presence of a perspective, which prizes and respects the dignity and worth of another above the differences between us.

Conceding to the blandishments of anger can distort our estimation both of the issue involved and also the appropriate extent and manner in which we pursue its ends; we can be blinded and deafened to any argument of truth, which stands in the way of our initial impulse.

People often assume that peace sits at the end of a debate or process; but, in fact, it must find a place much earlier on: indeed, as close to the outset as possible: a peace within protagonists, which enables us to channel the passion for a cause that we feel rather than be mastered by it.

Equally, of course, peace must find a place in any ambition that we might espouse: our goals will never be stably achieved if their emergence is not interwoven with a peaceful acceptance on the part of all, whose lives they touch.

However, none of this disparages the place of passion. Too singular an emphasis on peace can lead us to acquiesce in the philosophy of anything for a quiet life; and this, like good intentions, paves the road to Hell.

Seeking the true balancing of dove and flame - peace and passion - is a core strand of our discipleship and sanctification, because it not only makes our service of God more faithful and effective; but also deepens our insight into the nature of the God we seek to serve.