



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

Homily for the Feast of Saint Augustine of Hippo (28th August) 2026

It is an irony of the high Middle Ages that despite the fact that the scriptural and liturgical texts of their often developed religious observance were replete with references and exhortations to love, there was a common attitude that love was a dangerous influence in human society. The fear was first that it was not an emotion, which could easily be mastered; but for more than that, it undermined the rational approach to moral questions, overriding what reason might otherwise tell us was the correct and virtuous choice.

However, setting aside infatuation of various stripes, which are, at best, degraded experiences of love - overly subject to our fallen natures - and more often than not, not love at all, such a perspective is itself a product of flawed reasoning.

In reflecting on this for a moment, we might start by remembering that love is an intrinsic dimension of God: God is love, we are told; and whilst there is surely more to Him than that, never-the-less, it is a prominent characteristic of His Being. The love that we feel for others flows, to use the poetic metaphor, from His heart.

In view of this, we cannot suppose that love is inherently evil or even to be distrusted: we believe that it is the phenomenon, which holds together the persons of the Trinity and in an ideal world it would also represent the bond, which made of humanity a society, just, equal and truly at peace.

Love, therefore, is not antagonistic to rational exploration of human virtue, but one of the factors - maybe the principal factor - on which reason reflects: seeking the answer to the question of how we interpret the impulses of love and understand their significance.

The challenge for us in this undertaking is, as I have observed previously, we do not have the capacity to love in the infinite way that God does. Even the best of us cannot hold together the equal love of all people along with the love of humanity's good as a whole.

A little while ago, in a different connexion, a member of our Christian community reminded me of the dictum that, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." This can be true of love as well: Love in a particular and constrained circumstance unrelated to the greater reach of love can, indeed, lead us to a false view of the prompting of love; but that is not a reason to eschew the role of love in revealing evidence of the divine Will and Purpose.

If we view love in this way - a revelation of the divine Will and Purpose in much the same way that the Gospel is - we shall understand that we should not simply acquiesce in the love that comes easily to us, but explore in our minds what it tells us about the way that we should relate more widely to the people and world around us. Far from disrupting our faithful following of Christ, it sheds a particular light on the precepts of His Teaching and the *Traditio* of the Church in guiding the choices and actions of our lives.

The love that comes easily to us is not an end of the call to love, but is, as it were, the shallows of love from which we try to learn to wade further out and see that love embrace an ever wider circle of the humanity around us. Of course, the love we feel will express itself in different ways in any particular situation; none-the-less, it is the same love: and that might be the greatest challenge for us: to come to the understanding that love does not express itself in a single paradigm, but adapts to the circumstances of each relationship.

We should remember that it is the same love, which saw God send Jesus into the world that sees Him send us as well.