



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

Homily for the Feast of S James the Great (25th July) 2026

The author of the Former Epistle to Timothy, famously opined that, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." It is hardly challenging to think of any number of instances, which vindicate this assertion. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear the aphorism cited even by people who have no idea who first wrote it. Often, however, just as the Latin tag, "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes," is often mis-rendered as, ""Beware of Greeks bearing gifts," so people often proclaim that, "Money is the root of all evil," which is an overstatement of money's place in human frailty.

In point of fact, there are other obsessions, which can equally take us down the path of sin. The pursuit of power, as another adage reminds us can be corrupting; and the desire for status also can lure us away from righteousness. To be sure, the three strands of money, power and status can be and often are intertwined, but they are separate strands of human aspiration.

Over the years - in fact, now alas, decades, I have witnessed all sorts of manoeuvring for status as people vie for the significant places in processions, seats implying rank or choosing bits and pieces, which mark out the wearer as just a bit more important than the others around them. Of course, there is a good side to all of this, because the outward show give us a sense of who is who and the order of society.

However, those who seek to remind us of their status should heed the principle articulated in the events of the Gospel reading for today. When the mother of the sons of Zebedee asks that her offspring should sit either side of Jesus in His Kingdom, Jesus replies by asking them whether they are able to drink the cup that He must drink: in other words, are they prepared to pay the price of such status?

From the Christian perspective, status, like wealth and power, comes with responsibilities: duties, which are characterised by a particular need to exhibit the divine calling to humility, self-sacrifice and generosity of spirit. The more prominent, the more visible you are, the greater the need to be seen to reflect the values of the Gospel.

This challenge can be most acute when we achieve not material but what we might term moral status: when our deeds - or sometimes just events - elevate us above those around us. Moral status usually enjoys more than the formal recognition of others; there is at least an element of adulation to it as one is seen or believed to have risen above the ordinary expectations of humanity in one way or another.

Moral status can make a person highly influential; but we must be careful. The attainment of an unusual capacity for insight in a particular context does not necessarily mean that one possesses a superior wisdom or virtue more broadly. Attached to moral status is a responsibility to recognise and respect the boundaries of that status; if not, then one simply uses one's status to press opinions, which have no more merit to them than those of anyone else.

One also needs to guard against the world's appetite to exploit an individual's moral status for its own ends, be they financial or the advantages of sitting in the glow of one who is popularly considered morally notable for one reason or another.

Many people achieve a degree of status at least for a period during their lives even if the arena and reach of that eminence is limited. Some roles, which we might embrace for the best of motives, have, as it were, an element of ex-officio status attached to them - whether we seek it or not. We should always remember that status comes with inherent duties and responsibilities if we seek to remain faithful to the teaching and example of Jesus.