



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

### Homily for SS Philip & James (1<sup>st</sup> May) 2026

The first reading this evening from Saint Paul's Former Epistle to the Church in Corinth reads very much like a credal formulary, reciting, as it does, a list of what the author would consider apodictic assertions about the sequence of events on which his faith rests. Far from serendipitously, there are echoes of his text in the more familiar text of the Nicene Creed, which we recite on Sundays and greater festivals.

We might observe that this letter is, perhaps, the oldest document in the New Testament and, as it itself observes, was written at a time when the events it describes had occurred within the living memory of many who would have read it when first it was written. Already, therefore, within a couple of decades of the Resurrection, the Church - not just Saint Paul - was beginning to preserve a formalising record of what we would come to call the Faith of the Church.

In our own day, questions of doctrine are viewed with a degree of disparagement in some quarters. The suggestion is that we should focus on what we might term the ethical element of the Gospel - though it is not always easy in particular areas for us to find agreement on what that might entail.

However, underneath the fashionable squabbles of the moment, there is a foundational question of why we bother at all: and the answer to that is because of what we believe about Jesus Christ: the authority over our lives, our choices and our actions derives from Whom we believe Him to be; and that in turn rests on the doctrines, which Saint Paul began to establish in his letter to the Corinthian Christians.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus makes just this point as He both describes Himself as, "The Way, the Truth and the Life;" but also as He adumbrates what would come to be termed the doctrine of the *perichoresis* of the Trinity: the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Holy Trinity - as He puts it at this stage, He is in the Father and the Father is in Him: consideration had yet to be given to the Holy Spirit, Who also shares in this relationship of *perichoresis*.

It is on this relationship of God the Son to God the Father, which gives Jesus Christ the authority He claims - as He says in the Gospel. The events cited by Saint Paul in the first reading constitute, as it were, the visible outcrop of Christ's relationship to the Father - and God the Father to Him.

It is important that it is Christ, the Son of God, Who is the starting point of faith rather than some aspect or other of His teaching. We can, of course, hear the voice of God through the outworking of His Will and Purpose for mankind - we sing on Maundy Thursday that where love and charity are found, God is there.

At the same time, there is a risk if our discipleship is based on Christ's teaching rather than His Person that, in fact, we are not so much serving Him, but making common cause with One, particular aspects of Whose teaching happens to chime with values and attitudes, which are, for us, ultimately rooted in an alternative source of inspiration and authority.

In all the busyness of Church life, we must never lose sight of the fact that first and foremost, we are serving the Christ, Who, "Died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, was buried, was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." This, as Saint Paul says, of first importance.