



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

### Homily for the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (21<sup>st</sup> June) 2026

Some years ago, there came before the courts a case brought by a hospital trust concerning one of its patients. The man had declined treatment that would have significantly delayed - if not halted - the progress of his terminal illness. The man - a Christian - had argued that he had enjoyed a good life and was happy to acquiesce in God's Will that the moment was imminent when he would move to the next phase of his life - beyond the mortal realm; and that he put his trust in God's promise of a place in Heaven. The trust argued that he lacked capacity to make the decision, because had not understood the situation in which he found himself and that it was possible - even likely - that they would be able to prevent his death: by which they meant prolong his life - a distinction, which is opaque to many nowadays.

The judge spoke with the man for some time before rejecting the trust's application and commenting that he admired - even, perhaps, envied the man's faith.

I do not recall this event to suggest that Christians should refuse medical treatment. There are any of situations in which the man's choice would have been wrong. Advances in medical science and the skills of doctors are, generally speaking, though not necessarily in every detail, part of the co-creative role intrinsic to the human identity.

Rather, the episode might prompt a slightly more general consideration of the extent to which our stated belief in the life of the world to come leaves any discernible footprint in the journey of our decisions and choices.

Probably, it takes quite an accomplishment of Faith, as the Gospel exhorts, not to fear those who can harm the body even if we do consciously hold in our mind and conviction the truth that God cares for each and every one of us. The urge to avoid pain and disadvantage is great in most people and there is a reflexion to be undertaken about how that interacts into the Dominical urging not to fear. It likely does not mean that we should acquiesce in every assault; but none-the-less, we might wonder about the extent to which we factor in the divine care into our decisions.

More significantly, we might wonder how much we reflect on the possible impact on our immortal souls of our attitudes, choices and actions - thoughts, words and deeds. Whilst, of course, we believe both in God's forgiveness and the redeeming power of Christ's Sacrifice, as Saint Paul observes to the Church in Rome. Never-the-less, the Gospel makes it clear that our lives on earth affect our journey beyond this world. I wonder how often Christians nowadays actually give much thought to the eternal impact of the quality and character our earthly lives - or the extent to which they afford such a consideration as they rank the priorities of their days.

This, in turn, raises the important question of the degree to which, beyond a formal acknowledgement, we actually prize the prospect of a place in Heaven. Since we do not know the quality of the life of the man with whom I started this morning, this is the main point to emerge from his encounter with the court. Not only, at least so it appears, was what we call the *Hope of Heaven* an active element in his life perspective, but it was something - indeed, *the* thing - which he wanted for his life - both in terms of what would come once his life on earth was done and also in the choices that he made about his life, whilst still living in this world.

As I say, his approach does not provide a universal template; it is not even possible really firmly to state that he made the correct choice - that, ultimately, is a matter for God. However, his story raises points for us to contemplate as we grapple with our encounter with the life on earth and proclaim our belief in the life of the world to come.