



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

Homily for Sunday XII (19th June) 2022

The passage proclaimed for the Gospel this morning reads a bit like a short anthology of important sayings of Jesus - which it may well have been by the time that Luke was crafting his work. The three sections form a unity of thought, which could easily have been a piece of teaching material.

First, it answers the question, Who is Jesus of Nazareth? Seemingly, this had been a subject of some discussion, since there were a number of suggestions floating around. Whether or not the idea was that He was one of these characters redivivus or something of a latter-day version, who can say? But His closest associates had seen beyond the speculation to the truth - that He is the Christ - the anointed - of God. In other words, His divine authority is established.

The next section addresses the purpose of the work for which He is anointed - pointing to the Passion and Resurrection to come. There is no talk of raising armies - even of overthrowing the existing order, but simply of what will happen to Him. The significance of this is to underline that the Paschal events were not to be a setback or incidental to His work, but the key and central element of it. In other words, His divinely bestowed Mission inexorably took Him to Golgotha and subsequently the empty tomb.

From this Jesus draws the conclusion of the response that those who would follow Him should embrace: that, like Him, they should take up their cross daily and follow Him - even, if necessary, like Him being prepared to die for the Faith.

To a point, this catechetical material - if that is what it was - has lost some of its rawness down the centuries as the questions it addresses have been long settled.

We know that the early centuries of the Church were dominated by attempts to define who Jesus of Nazareth was. In many ways, the early formulations - such as the title "Christ" raised as many questions as they answered; but by and large the matter is settled.

Equally, the inevitability of the Passion is a given for us today; but it is not difficult to suppose that in its immediate aftermath there were many around, who pointed to it as a negation of the claims - ignoring, no doubt - ignoring or denying the fact of the Resurrection.

The third proposition, however, is as challenging as ever it was - that our response is to take up our cross and follow Christ. This aspect of the Gospel is never settled, since new challenges arise afresh in every generation and we cannot suppose that we have answered its call once and for all at some moment in the past. As the words of Jesus emphasise, its call confronts us anew every day.

It is tempting to imagine that our engagement with the mandate to take up our cross can find a level - a settled response, which can endure the years; but this notion is misconceived. Whilst it is true that some aspects of our response can be long-term commitments, there will also inevitably arise new challenges, which we cannot ignore on the basis that our discipleship has found its level.

Sometimes calls on our perspectives and time, our talents and resources can nag away at us for a protracted period before we acknowledge their claim on us and our lives. However, surely, it is part of the sanctification of our lives that we learn more readily to identify these claims and respond to them more expeditiously: to take up our cross and follow Christ.