



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

### Homily for the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (28<sup>th</sup> June) 2026

He who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward - part of the Gospel reading this morning; and a passage, which raises an interesting counterpoint to the prevailing philosophies in our contemporary society.

We might ask ourselves how we identify a righteous person: what is it about another, which makes us feel that she or he is marked out by a particular virtue of character?

There was a time when we codified righteousness - *the Four Cardinal Virtues, the Seven Gifts of the Spirit* and so on. However, in our own day these things have little purchase on the perspectives of people when it comes to recognising moral merit. As I have observed previously, at the time of the late Queen's death, her qualities - which reflected to a large extent the lists I have just mentioned - were frequently described as old-fashioned, implying regrettably or otherwise that they did not reflect the moral aspiration of modern society.

However, it has not really been a matter of one set of virtues replacing another - except in one sense to which I will return. Rather, there has been a philosophical shift away from what are termed moral absolutes towards what moral relativism: righteousness is in the eye of the beholder rather than measured against an apparently objective and shared yardstick.

What is more, very often the beholder - her or himself - becomes the yardstick: people see righteousness in people who have the same ethical aspirations that they do - particularly if they exhibit those qualities more firmly or consistently. In other words righteous people are people like us - or more particularly, people like me.

This brings us to the one apparent virtue, which is - at least for some - an objective virtue, so to speak: the duty to be authentically ourselves. By this, I infer people to mean that we should lay bare the person that we are, since there are no warts and all.

To a point, Christians might be able to agree with this proposition. After all, each of us has a unique God-given identity and our particular qualities and talents are bestowed so that we can play our part in the tapestry of the unfolding of the divine Will in earthly history; and, as Jesus observes, we should not hide our light.

At the same time, it is our belief that every one of us sins and falls short of the Glory of God: in other words, there are aspects of ourselves, which we should seek to reform as we pursue the goal of sanctification.

Some aspects of human conduct are objectively wrong - whatever the context and circumstances, which drive them. We might identify reasons why they have a purchase on particular individuals, but this does not deem them right.

Equally, there are instances of human conduct, which reflect God's Will for the commerce of mankind: traits, which were taught to us by Christ during His incarnate Ministry and inferred, since then, in the context of a praying community led by the Spirit. These are the qualities of the objectively virtuous person.

Furthermore, there we can infer from Jesus' words that there it is a sign of grace to recognise and acknowledge in another this objective virtue, because, we may surmise, that we have begun to see the world through the perspective inhabiting the divine Mind- even if we have not yet attained to the point where we practice that virtue ourselves.