



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

Homily for the Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (5th July) 2026

The latter paragraph of the Gospel reading - "Come unto Me, all who labour ..." and what follows is probably one of the best known passages of the New Testament. It is often read at times of distress as well, curiously, as being used in the priest's vesting prayers before Mass - you can make of that what you will.

However, I suspect that it does not say quite what many people hear. It does not offer physical respite from our burdens, but rest for our souls. In other words, the promise is of interior peace and one that invites us to conceive of achieving peace of mind in the opposite way from what is the norm.

We usually analyse our contentment as a response to the circumstances and context in which we are set. If our lives are comfortable and un-troubled, then we shall escape the predations of anxiety, resentment and all the other human emotions, which so disturb our tranquillity - the restfulness of our souls; but the Gospel invites us to take a different approach: find the tranquillity, which will enable us better to cope with the pressures from without.

In a way, this passage links with another from Saint Mark's Gospel about dietary rules, which observes that it is not what comes into us from outside, which can make us unclean, but that which emerges from, to use a common metaphor, the human heart. To put it another way, tranquillity is not to be found in the external contingencies of our lives, but in the disposition of our souls.

Saint Paul makes much the same point in the Epistle when he tells the Christians in Rome that their interests should be not in the unspiritual, but in the spiritual: their priority should be in cultivating their connexion with Christ and making that the framework for contending with the challenges of life, rather than permitting events to shape their approach to Christ.

Intrinsic to finding the rest for our souls is the understanding that we do not approach Christ as people who carry the cares of the world on our shoulders, but that we approach those cares carrying Christ with us; and this we do by turning to Him to find the calmness of soul, which proceeds from the peace of eternity. Yes, earthly issues have to be given seriousness of attention; but even the greatest of troubles cannot overcome the peace of God.

Cultivating within ourselves not just an intellectual assent to the peace, which flows from God's Being, but a connexion with it - indeed, becoming channels of it, as Saint Francis of Assisi famously prayed - is key to discovering the vindication of Christ's words in the Gospel this morning.

Rather than letting our earthly troubles consume us, we turn our attentions to the point beyond time when even death shall be no more and little by little we live more and more from that realm even as we remain in this one: for it is there that we find the peace for our souls; and in that peace we find the strength that will withstand the attempts of worldly pressures to crush us.

As those pressures assail us from every side this might seem an almost fantastical proposition: so God has given us the Mass as the focus of that search for eternity in the midst of the finite life of this world. As I have observed many times, although the shape of the Mass might be inherited from the past, its living power comes from beyond time: it is a outcrop of the endpoint of our discipleship, inserted into the present of our earthly lives.