



## 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 (7<sup>th</sup> July) 2024

As the theology of the Church has developed over the centuries, the brothers and sisters of Jesus have become somewhat of a liability, since they undermine the claim of *Maria semper virgo* - or, at least, so it seems. Some have tried to get around the problem by suggesting that these siblings were, in fact, children of Joseph by another wife or, maybe, cousins in a close-knit family, who approximated to sisters and brothers - who knows?

However, so it appears, they constituted an inconvenience to Jesus during His lifetime, since the knowledge of them and His own family background made those who knew Him resistant to any idea that He might be what He claimed to be. His was hardly a unique experience.

People whose status changes within a community can struggle to settle to their new situation. Many who suddenly come into large sums of money speak of the loneliness of no longer really fitting into their former associations; but more broadly, when, for whatever reason, someone is assigned a particular responsibility or profile, those around them can struggle to adapt to the new dispensation.

There can be a reluctance to having to defer to someone with whom one formerly rubbed shoulders on a level footing: people who are promoted through the ranks within an organisation frequently encounter this challenge as something of, "Who does he think he is?" swirls around them.

Furthermore, on the principle that no man is a hero to his valet, people recall all manner of past incidents, the remembrance of which can seem to undermine any claims to particular respect or regard. Jesus alludes to just this as He observes that, "A prophet is only despised in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house."

Yet, we need to accept that for the most part, those who are raised to prominence are actually people like us. In a society of any complexity, we need leadership and we cannot expect people to arise from nowhere to provide it. Indeed, many would argue, it is only the ordinary experience of life that enables individuals to provide authentic leadership; since, otherwise, there is the likelihood that principles are applied unrelated to the particular circumstances.

Of course, Jesus was not, in every way, a person like us; but He might have been more so than our developing recollection prefers to suppose. God chose to pursue His Purpose through One Who was fully human as well as fully divine. When Mrs Alexander taught us to sing, "Tears and smiles like us He knew," she put her finger on an important point - that His was a human upbringing; and this was much more apparent to those who witnessed His incarnate Life than it is today.

His work in the world continues in our own day; and for much of the time, He works His Will through the life of the Church, wherein His divine Being merges into the very human of the earthly institution. Ordinary people are called to lead - some as clerics, others remaining as laity. Either way, they are people like us, we might well know their families and friends, we might have worked with them or socialised with them; we might even have known them in the days of their exuberant youth.

The challenge for us is to see through the familiarity and discern if and when individuals are providing authentic leadership so that we do not become an inconvenience to the continuing work of Christ in the world.