



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

Homily for the Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (9th August) 2026

There is an anecdote about the late Queen recalled so widely that it is probably true. So it is said, at the end of the service at the end of the Falklands war in 1982, she rebuked the then Archbishop of Canterbury at the West Door of Saint Paul's Cathedral for the unremittingly penitential character of the Liturgy. For one who regularly immerses himself in books of history, the image of the monarch tearing a strip off the highest prelate in the land has pleasing resonances of a bygone order.

However, this was no Henry the Second making provocatively inflammatory comments. Rather, she opined that one was meant to feel better when one left church than one had felt when one arrived. I am not sure that is necessarily true; but if she were to argue - posthumously - that in the encounter with the power, goodness and redeeming love of Christ, we should find comfort and peace of mind, we could probably agree that such an aspiration generally holds good.

Mindful of her late Majesty's words, I will not list the storms that blow around us at the moment: at the global, regional, national, local and personal levels; I am sure that you could do this just as well as I, if not better. As we heard last week from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, none of these things can separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus, Who Presence pervades our gathering: in other words, we need to set these troubles, grim as they may be in earthly terms, in the greater context of God's Purpose of our Redemption, which cannot be overthrown by any worldly power. No matter how pressured we may feel, we must lift our eyes above the tumult and see the great prize in which we believe and for which we hope: the overwhelming love of God.

The challenge, of course, is to sustain this confidence once we depart from the Eucharistic assembly through which is woven the assurance of that Truth, most of all in the intense Presence of the risen Christ. In the terms of this morning's Gospel reading, the task is to sustain our confidence in our Christian hope once we leap from the barque of worship back into the fray of daily life with all its squalls.

Like Peter, the impulse often is to see the waves lapping around our feet and the wind blowing against our faces and panic. When we panic, we lose our grip on both our perspective and our ability to respond to events in a reasoned way. Sometimes, people who panic are described as being like rabbits caught in the headlights - aware of the danger, but mentally paralysed by the fear and unable to react in a rational way. When either we fall prey to this paralysis or random hyper-activity, like Peter, we are overwhelmed by events and begin to sink beneath the waves of the tempest.

Part of the menace of worldly events is that they portray themselves as more powerful than actually they are. They constrict our vision and press us to doubt that anything or Anyone can prevail against them: to believe that they are all that there is: if they wreak their havoc, then all is lost; but this is a deceit.

The task of our discipleship in such a context is to live our Faith in the ultimate power of God-in-Christ: we must fix our eyes on Christ and keep hold of Him - as one of the schamltzier hymns in our repertoire puts it, our Ark from the ocean's roar.

None of this diminishes the seriousness with which we address the adversities, which assail us; but we act as people who are aware that there is a world - there is a life beyond even the greatest of disasters; and it is in this, not the travails of earthly life that we put our trust.