



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

Homily for Sunday XVI (18th July) 2021

When Margaret Thatcher fell from power, it was reported that quite a number of Tory MPs were celebrating the end of ideology-driven politics. If that was true, it was a short-lived respite. In the decades that have followed, all manner of ideologies have come to the fore - or, in some cases, apparently emerged from nowhere. Buttressed by the development of social media, they daily clamour for our attention and acquiescence.

As some of us know well, the Church of England is grappling with these various issues and how she should respond. To a point, this is inevitable for a phenomenon, which aspires to be incarnational - an institution, which lives in the world as it is, rather than in secluded isolation or talking to a world as we would like to be rather than how it is.

However, we need to be careful. It is easy to be beguiled by the clatter on the internet and news programmes, which increasingly follow its lead, to imagine that these matters are all-consuming of attention in the society around us; but that is not the case.

For millions of people in this country and further afield, life and identity are not defined by these questions. Some are just not interested; many, I suspect, are much simply more focused on the demands of daily life - work, family and so on.

There is a danger as the vociferous greedily grab our attention that these people quietly negotiating the routine challenges of the days become, as the Gospel reading might term it, like sheep without a shepherd: that the Church becomes so caught up in the debates, which rage around us, that we neglect those for whom such discussions are of little interest or relevance.

Yet the pressures on their lives are just as real and demanding as the raft of issues are on those who seek to place them at the forefront of national debate and consciousness. These less visible people have an equal need of finding God's love and concern for them.

Whilst, of course, there are some attitudes and actions which have no place in a Christian community, we must be careful not to narrow our character beyond these boundaries. All people must feel that there is an equal place for them in our assemblies; and that their troubles and worries are of the same concern for us as those of others. Otherwise, they will suppose that we have nothing to say to them - and nor does God.

It is all too easy to become caught up in the moment and pre-occupied with that which shouts loudest. Sometimes, at least, we have to attend to clamour; but we also need to remember that it has a voracious appetite for our time and attention.

We must, therefore, also turn our minds towards those in a lonelier place away from the spotlight cast by public debate: to the people not, perhaps, overwhelmed by their circumstances, but still prey to pressure and just as entitled to know the love and concern of God as everyone else. Most of all, of course, they, too, need to hear and experience the Gospel of Christ so that they can make true sense of their lives and find reconciliation with their Maker.

After all, that, as the Epistle reminds us, is the fundamental purpose of our existence: to reunite souls with God; and it is a task, which embraces everyone equally, whatever their circumstances.