



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

Homily for the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (2nd August) 2026

A while ago, at an adjacent table to mine, there was a group of people, one of whom suddenly brandished a jar of something-or-other that she had purchased from the cosmetic department in Fenwicks, which, she advised her companions she could not live without. Only my innate diffidence prevented me from interrupting her flow to suggest that she could, actually, live without it.

One hears all sorts of claims about what constitute the necessities of their lives. In complex societies, of course, a range of apparatus is requisite to function fully in the daily routines: I sometimes contemplate with dismay that I shall one day need to surrender part of my attention to a *smart-phone* - or whatever comes along in a year or two to replace it

However, very few things are actually essential to sustain human life itself: one of them is food. As is the way of these things, over the millennia we have systematised our eating: we have designated eating at different times of day as almost different activities, each with its own name - breakfast, lunch dinner and so on; and our generalised expectations of what we might consume at each of these are also set: it is, for example, curious to find someone eating cornflakes in the evening.

Moreover, very early on eating became socialised; and from the banquet to the intimate dinner *à deux*, each style of meal has its own significance, which articulates the character and purpose of the gathering.

In all of this, the basic point of eating is rather lost under the layers of significance superimposed on the meal. Our minds are distracted from our basic need for food by the contingent events for which we have gathered to eat. The Christian tradition has long tried to counter this by the saying of Grace at the beginning of the meal, inviting us reflect that we have food to eat today and to be grateful for it; but I doubt that many minds linger long on that thought once they have sat down.

As we heard in the Gospel reading, meals were an important element in Jesus' incarnate Ministry as we can infer from the frequency and range of reported circumstances in which He ate with others. After the Ascension, as with temporal meals, this habit of gathering to eat developed into a somewhat stylised form, which we call the Mass; and also like the temporal world, we attach these meals to a range of circumstances: weddings, funerals, Ordinations, intercession for this or that and so on.

However, important as a celebration of these things certainly is, we should not forget that at its most basic level the Mass is a meal. It is, of course, inextricably interwoven with the Presence of the risen Christ and His one-and-for-all Sacrifice; and these two factors - meal and participation in Christ's redeeming work - account for the role of the Mass at its most fundamental level: as the Gospel of Saint John reminds us, the sustenance of our eternal lives. In other words, just as we eat our temporal meals every day to sustain our bodies during our earthly lives, so participation in the Mass sustains our souls as they journey towards the life of Heaven.

We would not willingly neglect to eat sufficient to sustain our bodily lives; and we should learn from this that nor should we neglect the sustenance of our souls. We might not feel pangs of hunger when we miss a Eucharistic meal in quite the same way; but our lives will begin to drift away from Christ and the discipleship to which He calls us; and perhaps we shall instead snatch a snack of the junk food which is worldly philosophy. In the end, as Saint John says, we cannot live eternally without the food, which on earth comes to us from Heaven.