



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

Homily for the Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (30th August) 2026

If we try to place ourselves in the scene described in this morning's Gospel reading, we might well imagine ourselves being quite startled by Jesus' rebuke of Peter. Of course, the four Evangelists between them only provide us with a few snapshots of what most people suppose to have been a three-year public life of preaching and teaching and, perhaps, this was not so uncharacteristic of Jesus as we might suppose. All the same, from the material we have, it is an unusual engagement between Our Lord and His Apostles.

Even though we are probably quite familiar with the narrative - people often quote Jesus' reprimand when another tries to tempt them into some misconceived action or other - the moment does serve to distract us from the momentum of the account; and, although, we are equally as familiar with the latter part of the story, the sharpness of Jesus' rejoinder to Peter's qualms can serve as a full-stop and we might not properly grasp the connexion between the two parts.

The scene opens with Jesus outlining what the future holds for Him in terms of the coming confrontation with the authorities and the Death, which would inexorably follow. In response, Peter bristles at the prospect, which is what earns him the rebuke. However, Jesus does not then continue to argue for why these things are necessary, but, instead, moves the conversation into a consideration of the nature of true discipleship: the willingness to renounce oneself, take up one's cross and follow Him.

In His response, we might infer from Jesus' words that He detected in Peter's resistance to what must be, not just - or even primarily - solicitude for his Master's well-being, but at least an element of self-interest.

As Jesus makes clear on a number of occasions, His incarnate Ministry furnishes an example for those who would be His followers, including, if necessary, preparedness to embrace a violent death and not shy away from the confrontations, which might provoke such an earthly end.

In Peter's remonstrance was, perhaps, concealed an attitude along the lines that Jesus' work is not worth dying for; and if he was not willing to see Jesus die for the cause, how much less would he be prepared to put his own neck on the line. In answering Jesus as he did, Peter was trying to shape Jesus' mission to make it more congenial and certainly safer for him.

Of course, for the generations, which came afterwards, Jesus' Crucifixion was an unalterable given; but there can be a continuing temptation to try and impose on Jesus a perspective, which is convenient for us: rather in the manner of the oft-heard assertion that something or other was just what someone would have wanted - often a statement untroubled by any evidence whatsoever.

The truth of the matter, as Jesus makes clear in the Gospel reading, is that Christian discipleship involves an element of self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice is not just concerned with the deployment of our time and resources, but also a recognition and acceptance that Truth is now always to be found where we would prefer it to be when guided by our earthly perceptions, attitudes and experiences.

Intellectually, we must acquiesce, because there is little point in seeking to be a follower of Christ, whilst simultaneously being an obstacle in His path. It is easy to construe Jesus' rebuke of Peter as a rejection of him; but, in fact, from what follows, we can understand it to mean - in a paraphrase of my own - get out of My way: you must fall in behind Me if you wish to follow Me.