



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

Homily for the Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (27th September) 2026

Before the most recent of the Deanery Development Group, I was talking to somebody about the possible course of events in one of the parishes of the Diocese. It was not a particularly happy scenario and I observed that it would not be a good look for the Church's reputation - whether or not it would be the right thing to do - and we wondered whether the responsible powers would, therefore, shy away from that step.

During my life-time, reputational risk has become a thing in that organisations analyse and manage the risk to their reputations. I once spent a whole meeting going through a lengthy document identifying risks to the charity's reputation and how they could be mitigated.

Of course, reputation has always been an issue for organisations in that their flourishing usually depended on being known to be good - or as good as they could be - at what they did; but today, reputational risk ranges much more widely, encouraging businesses and other corporations to adopt positions and policies on a wide range of issues: it is felt that their good name involves saying the right thing on a whole variety of subjects.

The challenge of this, of course, is that in our fast moving society, fashionable attitudes can change very quickly and in recent times we have seen many corporations hurriedly unpicking their overt support for particular positions on various matters.

This rather reveals the fact that such support was hardly deeply rooted or firmly held: it was just a matter of being *seen* to say the right thing - sometimes an instance of what is often termed "Virtue signalling."

In such a climate, we rarely know what anyone really thinks and it is unlikely that we are able to predict how people or organisations would act when the chips are down. Rather like the son in the parable this morning, who blithely agreed to obey his father's instruction and then failed to fulfil his undertaking, they will disappoint those who might rely on published and often publicised views.

More broadly, it creates an uncertain fragility when we cannot know what is truly lurking in the minds of those around us. The expectations of people's responses that are necessary to planning in and for a stable society are absent.

What is the case for organisations is also often true for individuals: that we choose - or at least are tempted - to say whatever we think others will want to hear; but when the moment comes for those words to be honoured by our actions we are missing in inaction.

Down the generations, the life of the Church has been bedevilled by this phenomenon. At times, it has been fashionable or convenient to assent to the claims of the Faith; but when the storms have started to blow or a different and more ephemerally better offer come along the commitments have been set at naught.

It was, I think, Charlie Chaplin who first said that words are cheap; but some words should not be. The "Yes" we say to God and His call to discipleship should be a word of great moment, governing our choices about how we use our time and resources as well as standing for perspectives - even if they are not a good look in the context of the world around us.

When God calls us to work in the vineyard of His earthly mission and we say, "Yes," that response only means anything if and when we actually turn up.