



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

Homily for the Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (4th October) 2026

We often speak of the *incarnational* character of the Church. By this we mean that she does not float separately through worldly history, but is integrated into the earthly communities of the particular moment and place in which she finds herself. This understanding is, of course, inspired by the Ministry of the Son of God - Whose Incarnation - *enfleshment* - was, as Saint Anselm sought to teach us - was an indispensable aspect of the work and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

To an extent, the Church continues this *incarnational* identity of Christ: commissioned by Him to be the visible sign of the Presence of the risen Christ in the world. We have developed a number of characteristics of this role - namely the Four Marks of the Church that she is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. What each of these means would take rather longer to outline than is available now; but together they provide the parameters of the Church's identity as the continuation of Christ's Ministry.

This is important, because it is often overlooked that no earthly institution holds, as it were, absolute title to the status of the Church, but occupies it as a tenant, working for the actual proprietor to further His Will and Purpose.

We should have this in mind as we engage with the real challenges of being an *incarnational* community, which is no easy task. Understanding how to embed the eternal Truth of the Gospel in the structures and routines of earthly life is fraught with dilemmas, because the philosophies, which underlie the worldly habits amidst which we live, are often at variance with perspectives, which flow from the mind of God.

Squeezing eternal verities into the finite intellectual and societal frameworks is an imprecise science. However, the real danger is that rather than incarnating the Faith in the contingencies of our day, we permit the Church to be colonised by the philosophies of this world. The incremental development of our mission can, if we are not vigilant, find us drifting in the currents of worldly philosophies rather than counsels of the Gospel.

It is for this reason that the Church must be *Semper Reformanda* - always reforming herself. The phrase was popularised by the Protestant theologian, Karl Barth though its substance had pervaded chapters of ecclesiastical history down the centuries; the sentiments, though not the precise words, were later echoed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Their import is that the Church must be vigilant in reflecting the character of her mission to ensure that the supposed incarnation or her mission have not, in fact, taken her away from the purposes for which the Church exists.

During the Liturgy, in our reading of Holy Scripture and in many other ways, we encounter the divine urging to reflect on the life of the Church: to ask ourselves whether we have taken a wrong turn or - maybe - a choice which was appropriate for its time has now had its day and no longer serves our authentic mission in the way that once it did.

This process is essential if we are to retain our tenancy of the Church. As the parable suggests, Christ and His Gospel cannot ultimately be excluded from the life of the Church and if we, the tenants reject Him by the choices that we make, then we shall be dispossessed of our stewardship of the Church and others will be found, who will work in the way and for the ends, which God seeks of us - as the parable puts it: "Deliver the produce to God when the season arrives."

This might sound menacing; but as the parable makes clear, God is patient with us and offers many opportunities to hear His call. It falls to us to listen for His ever more insistent voice.