



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

Homily for the Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (11th October) 2026

The scenario conjured up by Jesus in the Gospel this morning is one which has played out any number of times across the world and down the centuries. When powerful people are at the height of their powers, their vassals scratch out one another's eyes - even their own sometimes - to get an invitation to their masters' and mistress's parties. However, as the power begins to wane, so does the sociable enthusiasm of the acolytes of the powerful. Some just cannot be bothered to cultivate what is obviously a busting flush; others are more deliberate in their insouciance, visibly distancing themselves from the fading regime in the hope of thereby making themselves more attractively available to the rising star.

Understanding something of God through the paradigm of the parable requires an element of reflexion.

We start from the conviction that God's power never falters - He is eternally, God, the Father almighty. Yet it is indisputable that His authority over the lives of human beings waxes and wanes; and the reason why this can be the case is that He chooses not to clothe His authority with coercive power: the subjects of the Kingdom of Heaven voluntarily submit to His authority - not out of fear or even self-interest, but because they believe it - they know it to be the right thing to do.

From this, it follows that the effective decline in God's authority emanates not in any wearying of Him, but in the faltering of our own commitment to the choice that we have made to be subjects of His Kingdom. This can be a deliberate choice, of course, either because we lose our faith or as a response to pressure to conceal or abandon our adherence to the Kingdom of Heaven.

More often than not, however, the decline in God's authority for our lives is not planned or premeditated. Rather, it is almost a manifestation of the phenomenon of, "Out of sight, out of mind." Faced with immediate pressures or temptations, we do not feel the pull of God's authority - or not sufficiently to overcome the blandishments of worldly influence: not least since the consequences of the eternal price of disobedience seem slight when set against the prospect of an imminent - and perhaps apparently more real - cost of an unworldly choice.

Of course, as Saint Paul famously observed to the Church in Rome, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." On occasion, we indulge in deliberately ignoring the teaching of the Gospel, but equally often, perhaps, we just make the wrong judgement-call in the heat of the moment. As we know, when we acknowledge and repent of these faltering moments, our generous God is only too willing to forgive us.

Yet, we need to be cautious. A single lapse might seem to be easily overcome; but the oaks of habits can emerge from these acorns of initially occasional lapses. People frequently assume that our behaviour reveals the nature of the person within; but this is only part of the story. Our habits can, in fact, be character-forming, shaping us, to use a well-worn phrase in these parts, into the sorts of people we are. Whilst the outward and formal observance of the Faith continues, inside ourselves, the loyalty and obedience we owe as subjects of the Kingdom of God is gradually desiccating. This, in turn, sets us on an inexorable course, if our journey into estrangement from the Kingdom of God continues unchecked - as we learn from the Gospel.

It is tempting to characterise the fate of the absent invitees as God's punishment; but, in fact, as the story tells us, they absented themselves. Even at the end, God will not coerce us; and if we have fashioned ourselves into people who sit light to His authority, then He will honour that choice and leave us distant from Him.