



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

### Homily for Saint Andrew (1<sup>st</sup> December) 2025

In the Epistle this evening, Saint Paul, writing to the Church in Rome, argues from the need to believe to the concomitant necessity that God sends a preacher. This he does through a sequence of points, each derived from the one before: people cannot believe unless they have heard, they will not hear unless there is someone to tell them and so on. In so doing, Saint Paul demonstrates how to argue one's case.

When we are being taught to make an argument, we are told that we must get from our initial proposition to the conclusion through a set of stages that are sufficiently close one to next that people can follow the logic of the thinking. We might imagine a body of water too wide to leap with one bound, in which have been set a path of stepping stones: each stone must not be so far from the one after it that we cannot safely move along the route.

What is true of making an argument is also the case when we wish to understand the events of history and how we come to be where we are now. So, if we ask why Charles Windsor is King of England in our day, we might answer because Duke William of Normandy invaded our land and usurped the throne, thus dispossessing the line of Harold Godwinson. Whilst this is true, it does not, in fact, give an account of the subsequent twists and turns of royal succession, which might so easily have led down a different line. The same is also the case when we ask how the Church of today is Apostolic - an essential characteristic of the Church.

When people talk about the apostolicity of the Church, they often imagine, as it were, a golden ark of thought and practice, which passes over the intervening centuries, directly linking the time of Saint Andrew and his associates in the Apostolic college with the Church of the present day; but such a conception fails to account for the nature and content of what constitutes apostolicity today.

There is no golden ark. Rather, the inheritance from the Apostles has been filtered through two thousand years of human history: individuals, communities and events. All of these have served to inform and develop not only our understanding of what it means to be the Church Apostolic in our own day.

In its seventeen hundredth anniversary, churches East and West have reflected on the influence of the Council of Nicaea in that process. Although, the Council produced all manner of provisions, many of which subsequently fell by the wayside, attention has been focused on the proto Nicene Creed, which emerged from the deliberations. As we know, it was not immediately given the general recognition it enjoys today and was subject to a degree of revision over the next centuries. None-the-less, most Christians would now accept that it represents part of the Apostolic heritage of the Church.

However, it is not just these high level and high profile events, which shape the development of the Church's Apostolicity. Equally as important have been the lives of anonymous individuals and communities down the centuries, faithfully pursuing their discipleship, both maintaining the Faith and responding to the particular challenges of their situations. Much that we now take for granted as part of our inheritance of Faith and practice emerged in the specific local context and slowly spread across the life of the Church.

When Jesus called Saint Andrew all those centuries ago, He did not establish an immutable institution so much as set in train a process, which would see the Church develop and spread, never ceasing to learn as she went. We are still on those stepping stones in terms of learning what it means to be Apostolic.