



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

Homily for the Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (14th June) 2026

At the beginning of the Gospel reading this morning, Jesus observes the dejected and harassed state of the people and suggests that they are like sheep without a shepherd. It might sometimes seem to us that life without a shepherd is quite an attractive proposition: nobody to cajole us, nobody to try and make us what, in the moment, we would prefer not to be doing; but the "in the moment" is quite important.

Sheep probably do not reflect on the fact that were it not for the shepherd, they would not be here. The flock has been formed and managed to provide the various ovine resources, which human beings desire; and within that context, most shepherds look to the best interests of their sheep, usually knowing better what is good for the sheep in her or his care.

In a similar sort of a way, we are only here, because it pleases almighty God to put us here. The purpose of our lives, as Saint Augustine observed, is the sanctification, which sees us restored to the pristine state of complete peace and union with Him. Within that context, He sent Jesus Christ to reveal how we might achieve His Purpose.

The problem is that "in the moment" - often a very protracted moment - we bridle against the prescriptions of the Gospel, which would enable us to achieve that purpose for which we are made. They are characterised as fettering our freedom to be ourselves and the uniqueness of our individuality.

It is true, of course, that each of us is a unique individual and every person has a bespoke path through the life of this earth. At the same time, every path is inevitably interwoven with the paths of all the others - even those of people that we shall never meet - and all the more so in a world as interconnected as it is today - we only have to think of a virus, which emerged in China and laid low populations and societies across the globe or the people who get their inspiration from shadowy characters living in distant countries simply by clicking on a mouse a few times.

For all the fashionable talk of progress, "harassed and dejected" does not seem an inapposite description of how many people are feeling at the moment. The pressures on our lives appear to come at us from every direction, often wrapped up in uncertainty if not fear at what the future holds. Just as a lone sheep is vulnerable to predation, so also in the wilderness of societal turmoil, aloneness can render us defenceless against the array of exploitation and manipulation, which stalks our world.

In Christ and His Gospel, we have a Shepherd - *the* Shepherd - Who can provide us with the framework of life, which can see us navigate our way through the storms: not just in guiding our choices, but also in developing perspectives, which will help us take a broader view than that pressed on us by the exigencies of the moment.

The Gospel narrative goes on to describe the commission of the Twelve to go out and communicate the Presence of the Shepherd amongst them. They are told not to go to parts and people foreign, but to confine themselves to the people they know - not perhaps personally, but with whom they have a shared cultural and religious outlook.

Today, He offers a similar commission to us: to communicate in our conversation, choices and actions the hope we believe to inhere in listening to the voice of Jesus the Shepherd, Who understands better than we do ourselves, where our true interests lie; and in an oblique sort of a way, we shall return to this next week.