



Reflection for 3rd Week of Easter by Mgr Daniel McHugh

Grounded in Hope

The lockdown from Corona Virus has been a difficult experience for everyone, and at the same time it brought out a lot of good in people. From my own perspective, working with different Ethnic Communities, I have been moved by the generosity I have experienced from the Vietnamese Chaplaincy. A number of them work in Nail Spas and they are currently unemployed: they have seen the need for PPE and of course they use surgical masks and gloves. Thousands of these have been donated to the Birmingham City Council appeal to support “care homes, children’s services and home care”. Those who did not have PPE to donate are making a collection to purchase the same. I am sure we all know of ways in which our communities have responded with love and generosity: “I was reading about the special response of musicians and artists, not to mention sports people.

I noted particularly the paintings of Damien Hirst and David Hockney: Hirst is especially interesting because - and I hadn’t realised this before - he uses butterfly wings in his works: they are, as you probably know, symbols for new life, the butterfly coming from the chrysalis. And he did two paintings one of which is the rainbow, with the butterfly wings (ethnically sourced!) adorning it. He explained the rainbow saying “it gives you hope after the rain; after the gloom there’s kind of something brighter and the sun comes to shine so the rainbow is a great optimistic thing.” We are taken back to the spiritual meaning of the rainbow in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 9, where God placed the rainbow in the sky as a sign of the Covenant with Noah. The Covenant (before the Exodus) where God promises to be faithful to us, is a symbol of Christian Hope in life after death and destruction rather than what it has been seen by the Gay and Lesbian movement more recently, as a symbol of diversity.

Hope is all around us at the moment: children are seen with paintings of rainbows, and the wonderful Captain Bob walking for his 100 years said “At the end of the day: the sun will shine on you again and the clouds will go away”, and I was reminded in Thought for the Day on Friday last that an African Leader had said “There will be light at the end of the tunnel, but you can’t see it because of the bends.”

Yes, we use the word “Hope” a lot often in a rather uncertain way, people saying “let’s hope”. The Christian meaning of “Hope” being one of the 3 Theological virtues Faith, Hope and Charity, is a step change, and it is about trust in God born of His Faithfulness to us in sending Jesus to live among us, to give his life for us and rise again. Our hope is not something vague, but grounded in Him.

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I notice people often choose the reading from St John at a Requiem where Jesus says “I will return to take you with me, so that you will be with me where I am.” That is our Hope, not something vague or sentimental, or simple optimism but based on Jesus risen from the dead. He will really give us all the graces we need to overcome every obstacle and finally arrive at the perfect life for which we were made. That, I think, underpins the kissing of the Crucifix that we do on Good Friday: that is what Jesus did in love for us.

Somewhere, I’ve seen it written, that the Apostles were in “lockdown” after the death of Jesus: they were afraid and alone, frightened they might suffer the same fate. In fact, instead of resuming their normal lives, they distanced themselves from normal social gatherings. Then, during that stress, fear, anxiety, Jesus appeared to them and offered them peace. We need to accept his peace too into our closed and locked hearts, allowing Him to dwell within us, whatever is happening in the world outside.

It is His wish to walk with us as He did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus; when they invited Him to share their meal, they realised who it was, and they said to each other “Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” My feeling is, that reflecting on the Scriptures, each Sunday especially, we will find His spiritual presence with us in our life journey. St Peter, who was one of that “locked down” group, was able to write in his letter this 3rd Sunday “Through Him you now have Faith in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave him glory for that very reason, so that you would have Faith and Hope in God”.

Peter is also spoken of in the first reading from Acts, proclaiming to the crowds that it was impossible for Jesus to be held in the place of death, Hades, and quoting the Psalm of King David who prayed to God:

“I saw the Lord before us always, for with him at my right hand, nothing can shake me you have made known the way of life to me, you will fill me with gladness through your presence”.

We are indeed “Grounded in Hope”, we have nothing to fear. The Vietnamese people have given away what they may need after the lockdown. That seems to me to be a good example of Hope in practice.

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