



Reflection for the 5th Week of Easter 10/11 May by Mgr Daniel McHugh

You Point The Way

I have been watching “The Crown” from Netflix, one episode at a time, in the comfort of my living room. A treat at the end of each day. It’s a riveting film about the Royal Family that I access online without going to the Cinema. But I would never have started it without the encouragement of my Cousin who is into technology and a friend who has been watching it in Berlin. I encourage you to break down the barriers, if you have any, to the technology!

You might wonder what this can have to do with a Reflection on Scripture Readings for the 5th Week of Easter. Well, first of all, you will not be surprised to know that the “Lockdown” has brought about extraordinary developments in the use of the Internet: from the Grandmother who is using Facetime to speak to and see her children and grandchildren, to the parents in school who are co-operating on Facebook to collect parcels for a foodbank, to Priests using Youtube to film and stream Church services; there has been an amazing transformation. For me as a Priest concerned about the Congregations drifting away with Churches closed, it has been heartening to hear my friend - with real surprise - say 250 people watched Mass last Sunday. And, then I have come across a new publication “Everybody Welcome Online” pointing out the way in which the author, a Baptist Minister, has seen interest in Church services grow in Gateshead through the “internet”.

He reflects “Inviting someone to access an online service is easier than inviting them to attend a Church Building”. My mind went back to the 1980s when I was encouraging parishioners to take up the Catechumenate (an approach to drawing people into the Church that is influenced by the community orientated practice of the Church in the early centuries). One Lady said “I would not have been able to go to the Priest’s House to ask about learning the teachings of the Church, but when a friend accompanied me, it was easy.”

This Sunday Jesus says “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me”. How are non Church goers to hear what Jesus has to offer? Surprisingly maybe, more people are interested than you might think. That is one of the outcomes of the recent Lockdown, according to a survey spoken of by a BBC Correspondent, Martin Bashir, on the “news” last weekend;

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The interest of people has quadrupled: He said, he thought people felt Faith could be helpful to them personally and to the community. The result is more people are turning to the Internet to seek answers. It is easier to go there than to approach a Minister or Priest or even a lay person.

So, when St Peter says to the Faithful in the section of his 1st Letter read in Churches this Sunday that they are to sing the praises of God, in other words they are to make Him known, how are you to go about that? Increasingly, it will be through you prompting/directing others to the Internet where you are now being fed in the time of Lockdown.

When Peter speaks of Jesus as the Cornerstone and the Community as living stones making a spiritual house, it takes me back to one of my favourite pastimes for days away, going up mountains. A favourite within reach has been Cader Idris in mid Wales, just outside Dolgellau. It is one of those mountains that has more than one pathway up it and the key to getting to the top and a wonderful view (when not in cloud of course) is following the pathway marked by cairns - mounds of stones - left there by walkers over the years to mark the way to the top. When we are spoken of as living stones, we are meant to point the way too for those who are seeking “the way, the truth, the life.”

For me today, one of the lessons from the Lockdown is that the Church Community, the spiritual house, has discovered a new way of keeping in touch with others of Faith in the church, but also a new, and complimentary way, of reaching out to “the outsider” as Jesus did. So, when you are on the Internet think of inviting online friends to sites where you can simply send a link. You may be surprised how many people will respond, will dip into what the Church is doing, knowing that they will not end up on the “flower rota” for the next Sunday!

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