



Reflection for the 6th Week of Easter 17/18 May by Mgr Daniel McHugh

God with us

I am writing this Reflection for the 6th Week of Easter at a time of fear and uncertainty for many: the Corona Virus has impacted on everyone's life. We are being called to "Stay Alert" because we really are unsure what is the best way forward. On the other hand, we see coming through it all a great deal of hope, especially in the way people are dealing with it.

I am putting my thoughts on paper on Wednesday 13 May, as workers in manufacturing and construction are being encouraged to find ways of getting back to work. In the Church we have a special Feast of St Joseph the Worker at the beginning of May, when we pray for working people, emphasising the importance of their work to family and society. I have always celebrated this Feast, which is an "optional memorial", because I remember it was introduced by Pope Pius XII to counteract the emphasis by the Communists in Italy and elsewhere on the "Workers" with May Day Celebrations, as if they alone cared about them. The Pope wanted workers to be aware that we care about them. Their crucial role in society is shown by 60% of Britons self-identifying as working class in a survey made in 2016. The Church celebrates the worker going back to the time of St Joseph, the Carpenter; I remember as Chaplain to Young Christian Workers in my first Parish, starting 1968, enjoying leading them through Scripture reflection and Church Social Teaching, to an appreciation of their dignity as workers, and how they could as young Christians bring about change.

It was great this week to hear a contributor on Radio 4's Today Programme, speaking about how she felt "workers and employers" are coming together in their concern for safety and wellbeing in the workplace in the light of the need to get back to work in the present economic situation.

For me that is an example of signs of hope coming out of a situation that we would not have wished for: work suspended, employment threatened.

Another key matter in plans for getting back to life after "lockdown" is education and the fear staff and students and their parents have of returning to school on 1st June. Other countries are a bit ahead of us in this, and it is wonderful to see

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how teachers are adapting and creating in order to make it possible, even to the extent of one teacher giving the pupils special exercises to do while they are waiting in line, so keeping to social distancing and the little ones usefully occupied. It struck me just how much teachers are putting into preparation for the new beginning, how committed they are to what is a “vocation” not just a job.

If we are “alert” we can see good coming out of adversity, like the elderly man I heard reflecting on World War II and how his Faith helped him to come through. In that situation, his Faith was recognised by him as a key element in his survival.

In the Gospel today, Jesus is speaking to his disciples at the Last Supper about how he will remain with them after His death through the gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift of His presence with us, that many never see or experience. Like the man in war, we experience this presence personally, especially in times of adversity, but also at moments of new challenges. For this to happen, it is important to stand back, particularly at this time of the Pandemic, to see vistas opening up before us, to see God’s Spirit of love active in the world. It is important to cherish these blessings and not let them pass us by through lack of thoughtfulness and prayer. Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Advocate, another translation is Counsellor. This is the time to be aware of His presence, as Jesus says “He is with You, He is in You”.

We make our own the prayer of Psalm 65, the one for this Sunday:

*“Come and hear, all who fear God.
I will tell what he did for my soul:
Blessed be God who did not reject my prayer
Nor withhold his love from me”
Amen*

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