



**Reflection 19th Week of the Year 9 / 10 August
by Mgr Daniel McHugh**

“Jesus put out His hand and held him.”

There are moments in life we don't forget: one for me was the Good Friday Peace in Ireland. For all of us in these Islands, it was a great achievement, and this week we have been celebrating one of the key people who brought this about, John Hume, who has died.

We owe him so much; on the occasion of his death, many people from all sides have spoken out about his singular crucial role in it all. We have heard from Tony Blair, PM at the time. And Bertie Ahern, Taoiseach in Ireland, as well as David Trimble of the Unionist side, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize with John Hume, Gerry Adams, the leader of the Sinn Fein/IRA, and of course, from the Bishop in the Diocese of Derry, where he lived.

For us Catholics, it was particularly significant, because we can see in John a model, the ideal of the Lay Vocation in the Church. Yes, there is room of course, for the direct role in Church structures and organisations, but just as important is, that public witness and service that John displayed as a politician and worker for peace.

It was most interesting to read the Homily given by his priest, Fr Paul Farren, at his Requiem in St Eugene's Cathedral, this past week. He spoke of John's inspiration being the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching. Only last week, I met with Fr Terin, Chaplain to the Syro Malabar Community in Birmingham, speaking about the priorities for the future. The success of the Kerala Community is in bringing so many young people together for formation and education in the Faith. The future, as for many ethnic groups, in handing on the Faith, is the quality of catechesis and youth work, in our very secular world.

My mind goes back to the days when I was a lead Chaplain in the Young Christian Worker Movement, and its See, Judge, Act Methodology with Gospel Enquiries and Catholic Social Teaching sessions at the heart of each meeting. It was very successful: even today, going back some 50 years, I meet committed lay people who were formed using this method. I am hoping, that the inspiration of a John Hume will lead to our using

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the Y.C.W. method in our strategy for the Youth Work with all the ethnic groups I am now engaged with.

The Homily at John Hume's Funeral Requiem and an interview with his Bishop McKeown leads me to the Gospel for this 19th Sunday of the Year, where Prayer and the Person of Jesus are at its heart. John Hume went to Mass each day in his retirement years and returned later to sit quietly at the back of the Church to pray. In the Gospel after the teaching about the Kingdom of God in Parables, the healing of the sick people, and the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus goes off to the mountain to pray: I am sure this was how he kept his focus on the Will of His Father, as we see elsewhere in the Gospels. Then, in this passage, we see the Apostles in difficulties on the lake in a storm. It's in this moment of distress, that Jesus reveals himself and reaches out to Peter as he begins to sink, and leads him safely "walking on the water" to the boat, where all becomes calm again.

Undoubtedly, there were moments in Hume's negotiations with Adams and others, where he had to go on doggedly in Faith. Even his wife, Pat, speaks of trying to discourage him from going on; the quest for Peace was becoming a heavy burden on the family.

And, there is the other part of the jigsaw, the role of Pat Hume, which I have just become aware of. When John became seriously ill with Alzheimers, following a brain injury, she wrote a book in 2015 "John Hume – Peacemaker", where she speaks of the difficulty of living with someone with that condition. Apparently, she gave a "heart breaking" interview about it! And in 2018 she was awarded a "Lifetime Achievement" Award from the BBC. It is too much for this short homily, but here is an area, an issue, that needs exploring, being open about as she has been. Starting with the book would be a good idea.

In all areas and challenges of life, we can overcome when we reach out to take the hand of Jesus. Pope Francis puts it this way:

"We are all in need of a Father who extends his hand to us. To pray to Him, to invoke Him is not an illusion. Illusion is to think we can do without Him! Prayer is the soul of Hope."

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