



Reflection 21st Week of the Year 23/24 August 2020 by Mgr Daniel McHugh

Who could ever know the mind of the Lord?

Just now there is an touching story featuring in the “Travel Show” on BBC 24 Hour news channel. It’s a story from Croatia of the relationship between a man and a stork: it is so extraordinary, that people are travelling from all continents to see them. The female stork was found years ago by the Croatian man, injured and unable to fly. The good news of her, finding a mate with whom she has had young and who flies off each year with the young ones to Africa, returning to have a new family before going again, is beautifully told in the programme, including how the man looks after her and the chicks, feeding them with fresh fish he gets in the morning, and she in turn travels round with him. The bond between them reminds me to similar bonds we sometimes see between animals in some of the wonderful films from the natural world, caught on camera for TV in more recent times. We are in awe at it because it brings together different orders of nature in harmonious relationships, which are so unexpected.

The story of the choice of Simon to be “Peter / the Rock” on which the Church is built, in today’s Gospel, is even more extraordinary. Why an unlettered fisherman to lead Christ’s Church? We turn to the famous words of St Paul to the Romans in the Mass for the 21st Sunday of the Year “Who could ever know the mind of the Lord ... how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods.”

In fact, the one who is open to the message, the good news of Jesus, is the one who is chosen, the one who is open to His love: that is what is at the heart of the special relationship. Elsewhere in St John’s Gospel, Chapter 21, lies the other passage about the role of Peter, with which we are most familiar, where Jesus says to Peter “Do you love me more than these others do?” and Peter is given the role of being pastor to the flock.

In today’s Gospel from St Matthew Chapter 16 it is the profession of Faith of Peter that is highlighted: Jesus asks “Who do you say I am?” It is Simon who speaks “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And this leads to Jesus saying “Simon, son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in Heaven. So, I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it.”

It is because of these words and the words where Jesus gives Peter the task of Pastor of the flock that today we look to Pope Francis to lead the Church in our time in Faith and Love. On Wednesday this week, he spoke about this time of the Pandemic and the need to have a “new normal” when it is over “a normality which should not be social injustice

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or degradation of the environment.” The general theme of his catechesis was “Healing the World” and he pointed to Christ who loved us to the extreme; he quoted 2 Corinthians 8:9 where we read of Jesus “He made himself poor to enrich us by his poverty.”

In such an era of uncertainty, politically and economically, with people worried for their jobs, we are blessed to have a leader who can guide us in the way of Jesus. And, we can see why Jesus decided to leave the Church with the Petrine Ministry to guide his flock in truth and love. We give thanks for this ministry today and pray that Pope Francis may be strengthened for his task. We pray too for ourselves that we may be more spiritual stones of the spiritual house that St Peter speaks of in his first letter: a Church for the “healing of the world”.

We are in wonder at the stork who becomes a friend of the man in Croatia, even more wonderful is God’s choice of us to be his friends, who has entrusted to us the good news of reconciliation of the world in His Son, Jesus Christ. We thank you Lord.

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