



27th Week of the Year 4th/5th October 2020

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The God of Peace will be with you”

My friends from St George and St Teresa, Dorridge, were used to me speaking about my Rome experiences when I was a Parish Priest there. I don't think I spoke of Marino, a little town close to Castel Gandolfo, and the English College Summer Villa on Lake Albano. Well it is Harvest Time there, as it is here, and the unique celebration there is the Festival of Wine, as the grapes are harvested. On the first Sunday of October the wine runs in the fountains for an hour, and of course many go for the Festival! The recognition of the high quality white wine there goes back to Roman times, but the Religious and Cultural events now leading the Festival go back to the 1500s and the Victory of Christian forces over Turkish Muslims at the Battle of Lepanto in Greek waters. Pope Pius V instituted the Feast of Our Lady help of Christians in Thanksgiving; later it became Our Lady of the Rosary, the Memorial now on 7th October.

Those involved in the Battle included in a leadership capacity Mark Antonio Colonna, the historical Lord of Marino, and he gave instructions for the people to be given free wine; a pipeline was created parallel to the regular water pipes so that wine could be distributed via the fountains. So, the Festival has distinct Religious and Cultural dimensions: The Religious with the Blessing of Harvest and the procession of Madonna del Rosario, and the folkloristic with a parade of ancient costumes and allegorical wagons. We young students were never encouraged to go, but I can't speak for the Scots students who had their own summer house (and a vineyard) in Marino itself!

The Vineyard, as you can see in the first reading from Isaiah this Sunday, was special for the people of Israel, and was used as a metaphor for the people. And just as the owner of the Vineyard took great care of it, so did God take care of his people. Way back in OT times the Harvest of the Vines was accompanied by great celebration, dancing and so on.

This is the background to the Gospel reading today: Jesus continues his reproach of the Religious Leaders that we reflected on last Sunday with the Parable about the 2 Sons. Here Jesus takes up the theme of the House of Israel being the Lord's own vineyard in Isaiah, and clearly identifies the tenants with the Religious Leaders, who reject the prophets sent to them, and eventually reject Jesus Himself, the Son, and ensure his death. As we noted last week, all of this is leading to the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus at the hands of the Religious Leaders.

The Vineyard theme, like the Good Shepherd too, is a major one in the Gospels, and later Jesus in St John's Gospel, chapter 15, identifies Himself with the Vine when he speaks of us as the branches, a favorite reading of mine when I give Holy Communion to the sick. In chapter 15 we read, "Jesus says: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever

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remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing”.

This image of Jesus as the vine and we the branches leads us to think of our relationship with Him and with the material world in which we live. To nurture our relationship with Jesus, prayer, particularly in the Eucharist, is central. It is in the Eucharist that we are one with Our Lord, and it is in being one “in mind and heart” with Him, as St Paul says in the letter to the Philippians, that our prayer will be answered because it is made in Communion with Him; then the “God of peace will be with us.”

The material world in which we live is the source of imagery that Jesus uses to explain His kingdom. St Francis, whose Feast is on 4th October, this Sunday, is famous for his recognition of God’s presence in the world. A prayer that draws this out is his “Canticle of Creation” where he prays: “O Most High, all powerful, good Lord God, to you belongs praise, glory, honor and blessing. Be praised, my Lord for all your creation”. It is truly a beautiful prayer which can be found in Catholic Online.

This past week David Attenborough was interviewed about his new Instagram account, and he said this: “the Natural World is precious, treat it as such!” Each of us has a part to play in this, and as it is a symbol of God’s people, the Church, we have responsibilities there too. It is a challenge: we can only do our best to fill our “minds with everything that is true, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honor, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise” as St Paul says.

Then “the God of Peace will be with you”. We live as a people of joy. With St Francis we say “I praise and bless you Lord, and I give thanks to you, and I will serve you in all humility.”

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