



Podcast in Commemoration of St Ephrem, in Thanksgiving for the Success of the Visit of Pope Francis to Iraq: 16th March 2021

Mgr Daniel McHugh

Journey of Faith - Life from Holy Mass - with Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Hello, I am Monsignor Daniel McHugh. Thinking of my weekly Podcast for the Fourth Week of Lent, which starts on Laetare (rejoice) Sunday 14th March, I might normally think of St Patrick (my Confirmation name) 17th March or St Joseph (Protector of the Church) 19th March. But, I simply have to continue the theme of Rejoicing from Laetare Sunday by choosing St Ephrem, The Harp of the Spirit, for Tuesday 16th March, following the wonderful Apostolic Visit of Pope Francis to Iraq 5th-8th March.

Why St Ephrem? Because in Iraq the Christians have many Saints they honor and venerate, but prominent among them is St Ephrem, sometimes called the Syrian, not surprisingly because in the 300s the present national boundaries were not the same. In fact, all this area, including Southern Turkey was part of the Roman "Mesopotamia" a word with which we are familiar.

The visit of Pope Francis encourages us to consider and appreciate more the Christians of the East and in particular those who are united with the Catholic Church. To the fore in Iraq is the Chaldean Church which has a presence in the Archdiocese of Birmingham. Why, I wonder, have I not kept before the Feast of St Ephrem which is an "optional Memorial" on 9th June? Because the other memorial on this day is St Columba who came to Britain from Ireland as one of 12 Monks who established the Monastery of Iona and sent Monks to Evangelize in Scotland and into Northumbria, where their Monks set up the Monastery in Holy Island.

With my new mission to care for the different Ethnic Communities now playing such an important part in the Church in the UK, and anxious to support their Rites and Culture I am finding out more about them. When Pope Francis arrived in Iraq you will have noted the lovely music, dance and song that greeted him, part of the culture and life of the Church there. St Ephrem way back in the 300s, a Deacon, Theologian and Catechist, used music and poetry for his Catechizing in the Church. He is sometimes called St Ephrem, the Harp of the Spirit. 400 hymns written by St Ephrem still survive today and demonstrate how important it is in the Mission of the Church to incorporate local culture into the communication of the Gospel.

This week we are giving thanks for the safe return of Pope Francis and the impact of his visit with the Gospel message of Hope, Peace and Reconciliation in that war-torn land. The visit has been a great comfort to the Christians who continue to live there, and an encouragement to Muslims and other Faiths to live out with us the Fraternity that we all have before God, the Fraternity Pope Francis is proclaiming.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



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This week I would like my Podcast to encourage you to learn more about the Church in the East, perhaps starting with St Ephrem, and to pray for our fellow Christians of the East, those living there and those here, that they may continue strong in Faith and share with us their joy in it through their music, dance and song.

I have taken the reading from the Feast of St Ephrem. It is from St Paul's letter to the Colossians Ch 3:12-17....

I conclude with the Collect Prayer from the Mass of St Ephrem.

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St Ephrem

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