



15th Week of Ordinary Time: 11th /12th July 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Before the world was made, He chose us”

A while ago an article in America Magazine had this heading:

“Lay people have been passing on the Catholic Faith for 2000 years. Now Pope Francis has made it an official ministry.” It was referring to the fact that Pope Francis has recently established the lay ministry of Catechist in the Catholic Church via an Apostolic Letter “Antiquum Ministerium” (Ancient Ministry). It was not intended to diminish the responsibilities of the Bishops and his Priests for the passing on of the Faith, but rather it gives “recognition” to “those laymen and women who feel called by virtue of their Baptism to co-operate in the work of catechesis”.

This will mean that the preparation of people for this ministry will be taken more seriously, as will the commissioning. The Pope was keen to point out that this is an authentic lay vocation, not clerical.

Another document coming from Pope Francis to do with lay ministry not long ago (in January) was Spiritus Domini – the Spirit of the Lord - taken from the words of Our Lord spoke of Himself in Luke 4 when he came to the Synagogue in Nazareth: “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor”. This document was to do with women being able to receive the ministries of Lector and Acolyte; a public recognition by the Church of these ministries that do not proceed from, Holy Orders but from the Person’s Baptism. You will not immediately see much change here because we already have women readers and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. In a certain sense it is the “Canonical” Church catching up with what is already happening. However, it does two things:

1. Like the ministry of the Catechist this step gives recognition to lay ministries that were formerly connected to the clerical state. So, until 1972 ministries called minor orders were reserved to those on the journey to Priesthood.
2. And second it highlights again the centrality of Baptism which marks us out as Christians, and calls us to live out the life of Christ whatever our condition or status.

The beautiful reading from the Letter to the Ephesians for the 15th Sunday, after the initial greeting from St Paul, says “Blessed be God the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of Heaven in Christ; before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ.” This is bought to birth - formalized at Baptism when we are adopted as sons and daughters of God. The stained glass surround of the Baptistery at St George and St Theresa, Dorridge, has symbols associated with Baptism; the Dove representing the Holy Spirit; the Heart, the love of Jesus for us; the Cross, where new life in the Sacraments was opened up to us; and the Hand reaching

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down to us with the 3 fingers representing the Blessing of the three in one, as the Father chooses us.

The end of the Blessing section of the first Chapter of the letter to the Ephesians reads, “you too have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise, the pledge of our inheritance which brings freedom for those whom God has taken as his own, to make his glory praised.” Elsewhere in Ephesians Paul speaks of different gifts we have been given for building up the Body of Christ. It seems to me that the vision of Pope Francis is for each one of us to discover those gifts, and as his “anointed” use of them for the mission of the Church. The task of the Bishops is to discern the Ministries we need in an era when ministry is no longer linked only to being “clerical”, and the first step is to consider the training and preparation needed for Catechists, Lectors and Acolytes.

One theologian I have read on this thinks Pope Francis has a preference for the experience of Chiapas in Southern Mexico where they have been living a dynamic model of Ministerial Church for decades: “it’s a network of ministries, which are created around the concrete needs of the community, the discernment of all the years.”

The shortage of Priests is rightly a concern for the Church today. However, if it leads us to action on the possibilities of “lay ministry” that can only be a good thing. After all, we all rejoice that we have a share in the mission of proclaiming and living the Gospel.

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