



Podcast: St Bartholomew, Apostle of Truth, Feast 24<sup>th</sup> August 2021  
Mgr Daniel McHugh

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

Hello, I am Monsignor Daniel McHugh.

As I write this Reflection for the Feast of Bartholomew, the Apostle, 24<sup>th</sup> August, my mind goes back to student days in Rome when a visit to the Church of St Bartholomew on Tiber Island would have been on the agenda that day for the afternoon walk. The Church was founded on the site of the former Temple of Asclepius, the Greek God of Medicine and Healing, and houses the relics of St Bartholomew which were bought from Armenia to Benevento in Italy in 809, and then bought in 998 by the Holy Roman Emperor Otto III to the Church he founded. It shares the site with a Hospital run by the St John of God Community, founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. I have wondered whether the link between Bartholomew and health/wellbeing could have grown then, and interestingly the famous St Bart's Hospital in London has a rather special association with St Bartholomew too.

From the point of view of this reflection my interest is in the tradition that the Apostle St Bartholomew together with the Apostle St Jude Thaddeus is reputed to have taken the Christian Faith to Armenia in the first century. They laid the foundations on which Armenia became the first nation to become Christian in 301, even before Rome in the time of Constantine. Pope St John Paul II issued an Apostolic Letter in 2001 marking the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baptism of Armenian people. The history of the Armenian Christians is marked by the Cross. Only recently have we become more aware of its troubles in the conflict with Azerbaijan (97% Muslim country) and the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, mainly Christian.

The most terrible part of this history is the Armenian Genocide, named as such by Pope Francis during his Apostolic Visit to Armenia in 2016 and strongly rejected by the Turkish. It took place in the last days of the Ottoman Turks between 1915 and 1923. The Pope said the aim of his visit was "to support efforts on the way to peace" referring not only to the longstanding strife with Turkey, but also to Armenia's dispute with Azerbaijan over the province of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenian Catholics in communion with Rome are a small part of the population, the vast majority being Orthodox Christians. Pope Francis was the guest of Catholicos Karekin II the supreme Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and it was clear how close the two Churches have become as they work together to challenge to live out their calling to witness to Christ. Despite the division of the Church that came about at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the Pope was able to speak on behalf of both Churches urging Armenia's young people to become peacemakers "not content with the status quo, but actively engaged in building the culture of encounter and reconciliation."

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese

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In a joint statement both leaders referring to the current plight of Christians said “sadly we are witnessing an immense tragedy unfolding before our eyes, of countless innocent people being killed, displaced or forced into painful and uncertain exile by continuing conflicts on ethnic, economic, political and religious grounds in the Middle East and other parts of the world. As a result, religious and ethnic minorities have become the target of persecution and cruel treatment, to the point that suffering for one’s religious belief has become a daily reality.”

Today the Patriarchate of Cilicia, the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate, is housed among the Diaspora in Beirut, Lebanon. While the diocese of Cilicia dates back to 294 it was moved to Constantinople in 1866 and to Beirut 1928. Armenians are all over the world and continue to witness to the Faith brought to them by the Apostolic witness of St Bartholomew and enhanced and lived all through the centuries keeping the Faith and Culture of Armenia people alive.

We thank God for the recent visit of Pope Francis to Iraq and for the hope that he brought Christians in proclaiming the Gospel of love, peace fraternity in the context of radical Islam and atheistic socialism. The Armenian Catholic Community is one of 22 Eastern Rite Churches in communion with the see of Peter, and it has so much to bring to the difficulties of the Middle East, not least in Lebanon, where the Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Rai has been threatened recently by Hezbollah as a traitor and collaborator with Zionists.

St Bartholomew was martyred for his witness to Christ: we ask for his prayers for the leadership in the Church in the Middle East today, and for all Christians, and people of goodwill elsewhere, such as Afghanistan, in these frightening days. It is so appropriate that in the year 2000 Pope John Paul dedicated the St Bartholomew Basilica to the new Martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Reading is from St John’s Gospel where we are reminded of another name for Bartholomew, Nathaniel.

The Prayer is the Collect of the Mass for St Bartholomew.

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