



24th Week of Ordinary Time: Hope in All Things - Feast of the Triumph of the Cross (14 September)

Podcast Journey of Faith with Mgr Daniel McHugh

Hope in All Things

In these days I have been engaging with many memories:

- The 9/11 Memories of 20 years ago
- The International Eucharistic Congress in Hungary and the suffering of Catholics during Communism in Hungary and Eastern Europe
- Freda Stephens from Smethwick whose Requiem I celebrate in Dorridge on Tuesday
- And six days in Rome, recalling the time, 60 years ago, when I began my preparation for the Priesthood

We are gathering for Mass of the 24th Sunday we are about to celebrate the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. Do the Sunday Scriptures speak to my memories?

In the Gospel for the 24th Jesus speaks of himself as “The Son of Man” – the best understanding of this according to Scripture scholars is “human being”. The Disciples speak of him as the Messiah: the “Anointed”, and Jesus confides in them the outcome of His Ministry: he will be rejected, he must suffer and die, and will rise after 3 days. Peter disputes this and remonstrates with him. Jesus says that anyone who is His Disciple must follow His way: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me ... anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loves his life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it.”

To be Christ’s Disciple is to follow in the Way of the Cross. Imagine the fear this would have caused for the Apostles. Death by Crucifixion was a familiar method of execution in Roman occupied territories. It was an omnipresent danger to the Christian community for whom Mark wrote.

This past week I made a personal return to visit places that have special memories for me as I celebrate 60 years since I went, aged 19, to start a programme of study and formation for the Priesthood in Rome at the beginning of October 1961.

On this visit, I did not just recall beautiful places (which I visited again of course, and photographed) but also to prepare in the context of those places a Reflection for this Sunday’s Mass and the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross on Tuesday 14th September. This day holds a special meaning for me, as it is the Anniversary of the death of my Mother. It is now also the day of the Requiem this Tuesday for Freda, another Mother – this time of my former parishioners, the Stephens Family in Dorridge.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



I mention, for example, my visit to the Basilica of Santa Croce (the Holy Cross), a structure built during the age of Constantine which became “the Sanctuary of the Cross” housing relics of the Passion of Our Lord brought to Rome by St Helena, the Mother of the Emperor Constantine in the 300s.

Visitors and pilgrims to the Chapel of the Relics (nails from the hands and feet, splinters of wood, 2 thorns, the titulus, the timber plaque over the Cross carrying the words "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews") find there not a museum but a living place with signs that speak to the Christians of today in relation to the mystery of our salvation through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. When I visited the Basilica this past week, I found people at prayer and a large gathering of young people, led by their Priest/Chaplain in a Pilgrimage to this special place (near St John Lateran Cathedral), where the Cross is celebrated as the Triumph of Christ, leading to Resurrection, rather than his failure. There we are reminded of the Cross being the symbol of his total love for us; a symbol that we reverence on Good Friday; a symbol that stands beside us at every Holy Mass; and a teaching that the Way of the Cross that touches each of us in our lives, is the way to life: in a special moment the Cross is placed on our coffin in death, promising life.

The Disciples – and that includes us in our day - through the Gospel of the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, are taught we cannot have a risen Lord without a suffering Messiah, and that we cannot be his Disciples without walking his road of suffering and forgiveness.

In the Gospel for the Mass of the Triumph of the Cross we have these words of Our Lord to Nicodemus “Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave us his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life.”

“For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved.”

A visit to the Basilica of the Holy Trinity on a Day to Florence as part of my 60th Anniversary Celebration took me into the presence of a special Crucifix, called the Cross of Forgiveness before which St Giovanni Gualberti, 11th Century, prayed after sparing the life of the killer of his brother Ugo, inspired by the Lord Jesus who forgave on the Cross “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” He was rewarded, according to legend, by a bow of the head of Jesus on the Cross, which is pictured behind this podcast.

We continue to be challenged to forgive in our own lives; and in the Church is too, as we celebrate in these days with the International Eucharistic congress in Hungary, a part of the world where so many of our brothers and sisters suffered and were persecuted under Communism.

Those gathered in the tens of thousands yesterday for the Congress experienced wonderful scenes of joyful celebration in a Eucharistic Processing across Budapest. This

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Sunday, the Holy Father, Francis, joins them, continuing to celebrate the Lord who is risen and with us in the Blessed Sacrament in the Mass and in the Tabernacles on our Altars.

Tuesday 14th September we will all recall the Triumph of Jesus Crucified and embrace his Cross; I will take a special Cross (over the Tabernacle in my home) to place on the coffin at the Requiem for Freda Stephens; perhaps you will kiss the Cross on your Rosary, or make the sign of the Cross as you pass a Church, and pray in reverence:

Behold the wood of the Cross
On which hung the Saviour of the World

The Reading is taken from the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross St John Ch3

The Prayer is the Collect for the Feast

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Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese