



29th Week of Ordinary Time: 17th/18th October
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

You can't have missed the big news on the TV these past few days: William Shatner aged 90, the great Captain Kirk of Star Trek fame going into Space in a new Space Tourism Enterprise. Coming out of the capsule he said the flight was “the most profound experience” he could imagine and then “I hope I can maintain what I feel now. I don't want to lose it”. That was his reaction on seeing the created world from space. I am sure we will hear more as he is interviewed about it all. Was it a spiritual or religious experience for him? It will be interesting to hear what he has to say.

For us in the Church an experience is about to unfold that, hopefully, will be just as profound. I recall vividly being in Rome 59 years ago on 11 October 1959 as Pope St John XXIII began the Second Vatican Council: Bishops from all over the world gathered in Council with the Pope to reflect, pray and offer guidance for the Church and her Mission in the modern world. The Bishops from England and Wales were staying in the English College with us and we were following the debates, and resolutions day-by-day. It was exciting as work was being done in the light of the modern Theological and Biblical Studies and Pastoral Experience, on the presentation and communication of our Catholic Faith in these days. Pope John XXIII had famously said he wanted to “open the windows and let in the fresh air”. To some it might seem the windows were never closed again and there are a lot of unwelcome drafts! To others some 60 years on, it seems and remains an exciting time to live in.

And, now Pope Francis in taking forward the insights gained from the Council and has decided to embark upon a new phase in understanding, living and communicating our Faith called the Synod: a gathering or meeting, in this case open to the whole Church, to reflect prayerfully on our Faith in the world we live in today. This meeting or gathering is beginning now: it was launched last weekend in Rome by Pope Francis, and this weekend our Bishops are sending out Pastoral Letters to begin the process at local level. Priests began the sharing at Deanery meetings this week.

How will it all work out? Personally, I like the image of the Road to Emmaus. It was after the Passion and Death of Our Lord which is spoken of in the Gospel for the 29th Sunday; the two disciples were on the Road to Emmaus talking about all that had happened. We are told in the Gospel, they were “downcast” – everything they had hoped for seemed to be lost: the Messiah had been Crucified, He was not the triumphant King they expected. Then the Risen Jesus joined them on the road and shared in their conversation. He explained the meaning of the Scriptures: He was to die and rise again. Then when he came into the House with them, He broke bread, the bread of the Eucharist, and they recognized Him. It was not all over; it was just the beginning of their Mission! They

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rushed off to tell the others. And that story, the truth of the Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Jesus continues to be told; the Eucharist, the Breaking of the Bread, continues to be celebrated to our day.

Pope Francis sees the Synodal process as a journey too. Listening to Our Lord, sharing that experience, and listening to others, so that we can share our lived Faith through our Priests and Bishops with the Holy Father and those responsible for framing Church teaching and pastoral approaches. This is formulated in the light of the Gospels, the long tradition of Church teaching, and now the lived experience of the whole People of God. Above all that experience of Faith and our part needs to be experienced through prayerful listening to Jesus and each other on our journey.

The words of Jesus in the Gospel for the 29th Sunday are the words I put on my Ordination Card in 1967 “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Good words to make our own as we seek to play our part in making His way known to the world.

Please God we as a Church can communicate the “profound experience” we have had in meeting Jesus as a result of the Synod Journey. It is a profound experience lived in each Eucharist, and even greater than the wonder experienced in the trip to outer space this past week.

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