



27th Week in Ordinary Time: Living through Turmoil

2/3 October 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

The present political and economic turmoil across the world can lead to people being seriously troubled and worried for the future. It is understandable: when you wake up to the threats of nuclear weapons on the one hand, and the insecurity of our pensions on the other, we are living in the midst of uncertainty. Does the Faith we adhere to have anything to offer in times like this?

Interestingly, the first reading at Mass yesterday (Wednesday 28 September) was from the Old Testament Book of Job, from which we have had a selection of readings this week. The author of Job challenges the notion that God is always raining down good things on the man who lives by Faith. But, despite adversity, Job continues to trust God; not knowing why terrible experiences befall him, he still believes in God, the all-powerful has his reasons. All works out well for the man with Faith in the all-powerful creator. The message of the reading from Job was to trust in God whose reasons will be made known to the one who listens and trusts in His love.

The passage from the Gospel of St. Luke was on the Journey of Jesus to Jerusalem where ultimately, he was to be rejected and put to death. Those who follow him. Those who are His disciples, will not always have a comfortable journey: we are called to a certain detachment from material things and even in personal relationships, if we are to have full communion with Him. Just as He followed His Father’s will in love, so we are called even to embrace the Cross.

In this regard, I was blessed to come across the ten rules of life by the Venerable Cardinal Thuan recently: they grow from his time in prison under the Communist Regime in Vietnam.

The first rule “I will live the present moment to the fullest.” To explain the rule, the Cardinal writes: *“On August 15th 1975, on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, I was invited to the Palace of Independence, the President’s Palace in Saigon, only to be arrested. The motive was that Pope Paul VI had transferred me from my diocese in Nha Trang where I had been bishop for 8 years, between 1967 and 1975, to Saigon, to become Archbishop Coadjutor. For the Communist government this transfer, made one week before their arrival in Saigon, on April 30, 1975, was proof of a conspiracy between the Vatican and the Imperialists.*

From the very first moment of my arrest, the words of Bishop John Walsh, who had been imprisoned for 12 years in Communist China, came to my mind.

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*On the day of his liberation Bishop Walsh said, "I have spent half my life waiting"
It is true. All prisoners, myself included, constantly wait to be let go.*

I decided then and there that my captivity would not be merely a time of resignation but a turning point in my life.

I decided I would not wait. I would live the present moment and fill it with love. For if I wait, the things I wait for will never happen. The only thing that I can be sure of is that I am going to die.

I was removed far from my diocese and was taken to the village of Cay-Vang, 400 km from Saigon. Day and night I was obsessed with the thought of my people. How was I going to stay in touch with my people? Just at the time when they needed their pastor most. The separation was heart-breaking.

One night, light came: "It's simple, imitate the example of Saint Paul when he was in prison. He wrote letters to the various communities. The very next morning, I called to Quang, a little boy who was coming home from Mass. "Go and tell your mother to buy some old calendars". When evening came, Quang brought me the calendars and every night during the months of October and November 1975, I wrote down my message from captivity for my people. Every morning the boy took the torn-off pages home and his brothers and sisters recopied the message. That is how the book "The Road of Hope" came to be written, and it has been published into six languages: Vietnamese, English, French, Italian, German and Spanish. God's liberating power gives energy to work to accomplish even in the most desperate moments.

No, I will not spend time waiting. I will live the present moment and fill it with love. "A straight line consists of millions of little points". Likewise, a lifetime consists of millions of seconds and minutes joined together. If every single point along the line is rightly set, the line will be straight. If every minute of a life is good, that life will be holy. The Road of Hope is paved with small acts of hope along life's way. A life of hope is born of every minute of hope in that lifetime." (<http://www.nguyenvanthuan.com/ten-rules-of-life.html>)

In the Gospel for the 27th Sunday we hear Jesus speak about faith and service to God. Our Faith, even if it is as small as a mustard seed, enables us to believe that what we have offered in service to God, as His servants, can be made to produce a hundredfold.

This is true whatever our situation in life, whatever the opportunities for His service may be I find the lives of the Saints provide me with much to inspire me. One, in particular, who encouraged me at the beginning of life in the Seminary was St. Therese of Lisieux. It was her account of her spiritual life in "The Story of a Soul" which I read later, that impressed me deeply: "doing small things with love".

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We will be celebrating her Feast this weekend, Saturday 1st October. Her life in the Carmel at Lisieux might seem to have little relevance to our experience today, but living with others, working alongside different personalities carrying the burden of tuberculosis, has much to say to those who are finding relationships difficult and/or carrying the cross of sickness. Therese offered everything in love for the salvation of the world. Though she lived in the Carmel, she gave her life for the “missions”, and this resulted in her becoming Patron of Missionary work of the Church. Her deep spirituality led to her being declared a Doctor of the Church too.

But how we are to develop our life of prayer so that we become one with Christ; becoming one with Him through listening to His voice, whatever our Cross may be, and rise above the worries and turbulence of our times to rise to new life?

The central prayer of devotion uniting us with Mary to the mysteries of our Faith; the so treasured by the Church, is the Rosary. You may pray it regularly, but October is the month to refresh it or begin if it isn't your practice. The Feast of the Holy Rosary is 7 October, and 5 October is the memorial of a great Champion of it: Blessed Bartolo Longo. He built the Basilica of the Rosary at Pompeii, the famous town buried by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. Bartolo Longo was a lawyer who converted to Catholicism. In the 1860s he was influenced by Spiritism and Occultism when he was a student at the University of Naples. In the following years, Longo's life became one of depression, nervousness and confusion, and it was his friend Pepe who convinced him to abandon Satanism and introduced him to a Dominican Priest, Alberto Redente, who introduced him to the Rosary. Longo wrote of his personal struggles with mental illness, paranoia and anxiety; he noted struggling with suicidal thoughts, but rejected them by recalling the words of St. Dominic “he who propagates my Rosary will be saved”. Bartolo Longo's story is an inspiration too: his body dressed in the Uniform of a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre rests in a side Chapel of the Basilica he built; evidence of his wonderful work for the poor, for training young people for work, and more besides, is to be seen all round the square in which the Basilica of the Rosary stands.

In these turbulent times, let us turn in Faith to the Lord who promises life eternal and pray the words of the Alleluia verse on the 27th Sunday: **“Speak Lord Your servant is listening”**

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