



33rd Week of the Year and the Persecuted Church: 13th / 14th November

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Your endurance will win you your lives”

I am supporting the Cameroonian Community in the absence of their Priest at the moment. This past week I asked the leader of the Catholic Women’s Association of the Cameroonian Chaplaincy (the CWA), “is there anything I can do to support one of your sister’s whose mother has died back home in the Cameroon?” She said the most important thing you can do is to pray: “What the family needs is your prayers: pray for the children she has left behind and the entire family. And pray for a safe journey to the village where her body will be laid to rest...the village is in a war-torn zone next to the village where the priests and the religious were recently abducted in the Cameroon. Please help in your prayers.” The CWA is under the patronage of Our Lady, Queen of Peace; in their WhatsApp group I see woman of prayer for each other, for the community and for the world.

I had not been so conscious of the problems for the Church in the Cameroon. My mind turns to “Red Wednesday” which takes place in November each year, this year on 23rd November. I saw the other day a post on the website of the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Family in Exile: “Red Wednesday: help break the silence on the nature and scale of discrimination against Christians and other minority Faith groups globally.” It is promoted by Aid to the Church in Need which has long campaigned to draw attention to persecution of Christians, while not forgetting the position of other faith groups being persecuted too. Red Wednesday is marked by lighting up Churches, Crosses and other focal points (I had a tree in our Church grounds lit up in red) and arranging times of prayer and education accompanied by fundraising initiatives to provide religious resources and support for places/people where there is physical poverty too. I have always thought of “spiritual poverty” being a special concern to the Church: that is where we have the knowledge and Faith to answer people’s deepest needs.

It is being said that we live in troubled times, and we do: the power and speed of the media means we are more aware of troubles arising in many parts than we would have been before the advent of such advanced means of communication. But, as Christians, we should be conscious that the media is not always focused on facts that concern us; for example, the Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis to Bahrain this past week got little coverage, though it was the most encouraging example of his concern for dialogue and solidarity with other Faith Communities. And you would not hear that the trial of Cardinal Zen is taking place in Hong Kong on the grounds that he supported a charity assisting those who were protesting the new laws taking away the freedoms of the people there. Again, in the ongoing debate over the difficult subject of Abortion in the United States there is rightly a focus on the rights of woman, but nothing is being said about the rights of the child! Isn’t that one sided?

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In the Gospel for the 33rd Sunday, which is from St Luke, we are near the end of Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem, just prior to the events that would lead to his crucifixion. It is enlightening to see the context as outlined for us in "Sunday Connection" from Loyola Press. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem took place in 70AD, and Luke wrote the Gospel 80 to 90 AD. His audience was probably gentile, and he is trying to interpret it in terms of God's plan for humankind. At the same time, Luke is suggesting that there will be a considerable time before Jesus' final coming. Luke's listeners have likely seen much upheaval (as we are in these days) and are anxious to know if these are signs of Jesus coming. In the second part of the Gospel passage, Jesus warns that His followers will face persecution for their beliefs. He presents persecution as an opportunity for them to "give testimony". Perseverance will lead to their salvation. The commentary concludes: "Here Jesus is assuring his followers that God is present to all believers, even in times of trouble. Ultimately, Jesus will witness to this with his own death. As disciples of Jesus, we try to follow his example, trusting in God's mercy and protection, even when we are facing difficulties."

The last words of the Gospel passage are those of Our Lord "Your endurance will win you your lives". The first reading is from the Prophet Malachy, and it puts it this way "for you who fear my name, the son of righteousness will shine out with healing in its rays". The mystery of the life of Jesus is about death leading to new life. St Luke later in his Gospel recalls these words of Jesus "was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter his glory?" And so must we, so must our world.

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