



The Baptism of the Lord 8 January 2023 – Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on Him.”

As I am writing this Reflection (Wednesday 4 January) my thoughts are on Pope Benedict XVI whose Requiem is tomorrow 5 January in Peter’s Square, Rome. Much is being written and said about him. My favourite story is from a former Swiss Guard, Andreas Widmer, who is recorded on TikTok by the Napa Institute. Andreas recalls the summertime as at Castel Gandolfo, when on a Sunday the Swiss Guards would have a barbecue. It happened like this; Mgr Giorg, the brother of Pope Benedict would go to the Guards and ask whether they were having a barbecue. The answer was “yes”. Could he go to join them for some bratwurst and beer? The answer of course, you are always welcome. On leaving, Giorg would ask “Can I bring a friend?”. Again the answer was “yes”. When Giorg turned up it would be with Benedict, who would enjoy bratwurst and beer with everyone else. The reason why it happened like this said Andreas was because if Pope Benedict had asked, then his whole entourage would turn up, everything would have to be specially prepared and so on. The Pope didn’t want all that fuss “he went quietly in a humble manner”.

I loved this story because it’s given an insight into the person he was. It has been said “he was humble”, but this put flesh on it, a story from real life. Many times it has been said in TV interviews that he was an “academic” as if that was not pastoral. I heard one theologian say how good he was at putting theology across in a way that reached people who were not so schooled in theological language; that for me showed his pastoral concern for his flock. The two do not need to be set in opposition to each other.

One of his important achievements was the Catechism of the Catholic Church which was published in the time of Pope St John Paul II: it is a compendium of Catholic teaching which guides us in following the Gospel and traditions of the Church down through the centuries. Pope St John Paul wrote in his introduction to the Catechism: “May the light of the true faith free humanity from the ignorance and slavery of sin in order to lead us to the only freedom worthy of the name: that life in Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”. I found in my life as a priest that a reference point was needed in teaching and handing on our Faith in Schools and Parishes. The Catechism was created out of Pastoral need by the Chief Shepherd of the Flock.

It is especially appropriate that we celebrate Pope Benedict’s life of teaching and service to the church on the occasion of the Baptism of Our Lord, the occasion on which it is recalled in the Alleluia of the Liturgy “The heavens opened and the Father’s voice resounded: “this is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to Him”. Pope Benedict saw his life as service to Jesus the Word, the Light come into the world.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

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The Sunday connection says:

“This Sunday marks a transition from the Christmas Season to Ordinary Time”. In a way, today’s feast is the high point of the Christmas Season. Before Jesus’ birth, angels announced to Mary and Joseph who Jesus would be. At his birth, the Shepherds and the Magi recognise Jesus as the Messiah. At His Baptism, Jesus accepts that He is God’s Son and inaugurates that mission. In an analogous way, our Baptism inaugurates our mission as Christians. As we take Holy Water once more recalling our Baptism on leaving church, following the Pandemic, may this reflection from Pope Benedict inspire us:

“And only where God is seen does life truly begin.
Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is.
We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution.
Each of us is the result of a thought of God.
Each of us is willed,
each of us is loved,
each of us is necessary.
There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel,
by the encounter with Christ.
There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him
and to speak to others of our friendship with Him”.

This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on Him.

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