



Third week in Ordinary Time 22/23 January 2023 – Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

*“You are mad because you are not like us.”*

This week I was pleased to celebrate Morning Mass in Holy Family Church, Small Heath on the Feast of St Anthony, Abbot, on 17 January. It gave me the opportunity to speak briefly about this great “Desert Father” from Egypt who was instrumental in the foundation of monastic life, even before the time of the great St Benedict of Norcia. Like the call of the first four Apostles: “Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew... [and] another pair of brothers, James and John who had seen the great Light”, that is Jesus who “proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom” and “left their nets and followed him”, Anthony was inspired by the words of Jesus in Matthew Chapter 19:21 (read on the Feast): “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell everything you own and give it to the poor, and come follow me”. Anthony took these words literally and began life as a hermit, meditating on God’s word in a solitary life. Later, he was to realise that if you live those words without others around you, there is a danger in such solitude. He created ‘monastic’ life where there is a community committed to the same goal, joined in prayer, work and meditation, overseen by the Abbot or Superior.

Religious life was born in the 200-300s from a desire, in union with each other, to witness, to live out in full an authentic following of the way given us by Jesus. St Anthony and others like him, were much sought after for their wisdom and closeness to Jesus, the Light of the World. I was to see that wisdom in a quote on the internet giving these words of St Anthony:

“The days are coming when men will go mad, and when they see a man who has kept his senses, they will rise up against him, saying, “You are mad, because you are not like us”.

The person who posted it inferred that we are at that point today. And we experience it as Christians living by the Light of Christ, and bringing the Word to the great issues of our time. So much of what we believe in as the Light to guide our steps is ignored or thrashed without any serious attempt to listen or to learn.

This morning, 18 January, writing this Reflection, one of the main items in the News was of the Church of England; though it is sympathetic to individuals; refusing to consider introducing same sex marriage in Church. The tone of the Report was one of incredulity, as if to say this is not the way forward in an enlightened society. As I celebrated Mass today at the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, I thought how important it is for Christians to witness together to fundamental matters on which society is based.

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese

---



Happily, there are other sides to public reaction to the place of the Gospel in the world today: one this past week has been the visit of Cardinal Al Rahi the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East and Head of the Maronite Church Community in Lebanon. It was very encouraging to see reports of him in the Houses of Parliament being listened to and acknowledged by Politicians and other Churches on the importance of his role in working for peace and drawing communities together in Lebanon amid all the issues it is facing as a result of corruption and immigration. The recognition of the Church's role as "bridge-builder" in fractured societies at war in some parts of the world is one of the encouraging signs of acceptance of the power of the Gospel, the fulfilment in Christ of the words of Isaiah in the first Reading of the Third Sunday "The People that walked in darkness have seen a great light; on these who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone".

Reflecting further on the focus of the Prayer for the Octave of Christian Unity this year I see another way in which the relevance of the Gospel can be seen to be more relevant in terms of the issues society faces. The theme is "Be-Longing: Praying for Unity amidst Injustice" and in it the Churches seek to explore how the work of Christian Unity can promote racial justice across all levels of society. In recent years we have seen the Churches come together with 'caring' organisations in the community to support people through food banks, and more recently we have seen the Churches working together and being a symbol of hope to refugees, especially from Ukraine; in the upcoming Intercultural Mass in the North of the Diocese we celebrate the many ethnic communities making up the one Body of Christ linked with the Chair of Peter. From this position of strength of many being one in Christ, we can reflect on how to move forward with others to break down the barriers of racism that still breed injustice in our society today.

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese