



5th week in Ordinary Time and Candlemas 5th & 6th February 2023 – Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“A Light in the darkness.”

On Thursday 2 February I was pleased to celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord – also called Candlemas – in St Chad’s Cathedral. It was a joy to celebrate the Feast: a good gathering of the Faithful, all assembled with their candles alight for the opening ceremony of Blessing the Candles and recalling the occasion 40 days after the Birth of Jesus when he was presented in the Temple, according to Jewish tradition. In my reflection after the Gospel I proposed that we see ourselves with our candles lit alongside Simeon and Anna proclaiming Jesus “The Light of the world”, the long promised Redeemer. And, in the Mass of the Presentation, offering our lives anew, knowing that we are called to do this – in word and in deed – in witness to Him, even to the point of the Cross that Jesus was to carry, and like Mary whose heart was pierced in suffering with Him.

I thanked God with them for the opportunity of attending this Mass of Presentation and Candlemas – one of my favourites – and said we would be continuing this theme of being “a light in the darkness” when we reflect on the Mass Readings for the 5th Sunday of the year and our responsibility to proclaim Christ the Light of the World in our words and deeds. In St Matthew’s Gospel for the 5th Sunday Jesus says to his disciples: “You are the Light of the World”. My thoughts turned to St Josef Freinademetz whose Sanctuary I visited in the Alta Badia on my way break in the South Tyrol last week. He became a Missionary in China as a Divine Word Father. His witness bore much fruit among the people in Shandong where he was; there were 158 Catholics when he arrived from Hong Kong; when he left, there were some 200,000. He famously said “If Europeans behaved like Christians, the Chinese would be Christians”.

It gives you pause for thought! And, this week we have been following the Apostolic Visit of Pope Francis to the Democratic Republic of the Congo: I have not found time to read his addresses yet, but reports are that he has been explicit on the way the vast resources of the country have been exploited, often by people who call themselves Christians. At the same time, I was pleased to hear his final address to the Bishops of the country before moving on to South Sudan. People from the Congo in our Diocese will be happy to hear what he said: “Jesus wants to shine forth in you. Thank you for your pastoral zeal and witness... be prophets of hope for the people, apostles of justice...witnesses of Mercy...God will not abandon us if we remain faithful”. These are just snippets of the notes I made of what he said. In particular, he looked back to the great Pastors who had spread the Faith among the people. Then the Holy Father looked forward to the upcoming Eucharistic Congress in Lubumbashi: highlighting the fact that

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it is the Eucharist that sustains us for the action that Jesus expects us to see show forth in our lives in this Sunday's Gospel "You are the light of the world... No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven".

The Reading from the Prophet Isaiah for the Fifth Sunday spells this out leading us to reflect on the Corporal Works of Mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting those in prison, sheltering the homeless, ransoming the captive, burying the dead. Fr Ferlita in his commentary says: "But surely 'good deeds' will include the seven Spiritual Works of mercy as well: to admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, to pray for the living and the dead". Then, says Isaiah 58: 8 "Your light will shine forth like the dawn". Ferlita concludes: "And, the light that is made to shine for others will be healing and unifying for you too: "The light shall shine for you in darkness, and in the gloom shall become for you like midday"(Isaiah 58:10).

The encouragement Pope Francis gave the Leaders of the Church in the Congo is meant for us too! We may feel our light is a little light, as it says in the Hymn "Let my little light shine", but together we light up the whole sky.

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