



7<sup>th</sup> week of the year and Ash Wednesday 19 & 22 February 2023 – Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

*“You belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”*

As I was preparing this Reflection I came across the Memorial Card of a Religious Sister who had worked with me at Maryvale. On the front of it was a quotation from Isaiah 43.1 “I have called you by your name, you are mine”. On the back the words:

“O God, grant us a new vision of your glory,  
A new experience of your power,  
A new faithfulness to your Word,  
And a new consecration to your service”.

The two draw together the central theme of this Sunday’s Readings and the purpose of Lent which begins on Ash Wednesday this coming week.

I often think how Blessed I have been to receive Faith in Our Lord Jesus, and the Way He has taught; something you too must have reflected on, especially in moments that present challenges in life. It is daunting to consider this Sunday however that we have been called to perfection of life! The Lord we have Faith in is not calling us to the comfort of His presence with us alone. The Gospel concludes with these words: “You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect”.

Fr Ferlita writes: “Be holy, be perfect, be God’s temple. But how is this possible? It is possible because ‘the Spirit of the God dwells in [us] (1 Cor 3:16), and God is love, and love makes all things possible. He tells a story of our times about a woman named Maria, a psychologist, the mother of ten. The government of the country in which she lives was vehemently opposed to religion. She and her husband spoke out against its policies. Both lost their jobs, and her husband was imprisoned.

Maria, writing to one of her friends, said: “We are experiencing hand-to-mouth existence. We have lost all our money, our security, our typewriter and many of our books. In spite of this experience now, more than ever, the joy of the presence of Christ...It is from this that we gain our inner freedom, which enables us to love our enemies. This love cannot be broken; we only wish our enemies could experience this same love. Pray with us for our opponents who persecute us. It is possible that this is the purpose behind our sufferings and difficulties, for they need prayers more than we do”.

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese

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We are called to holiness in the Scriptures not just a “bare bones faith” as Pollard says in his book ‘Finding Fresh Light’. He goes on to comment that our shepherds seem pleased if we can hold on to any faith at all in this generation and time!

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, an opportunity to reflect and pray about the special calling we have to “belong to Christ” as St Paul writes in 1 Corinthians for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday. The readings on this day call us to a change of heart, renewal of the living out of the call to holiness, especially in love of God and neighbour. The Ashes traced in the sign of the Cross on our foreheads are “an ancient symbol of our mortality” says the author of the reflection for Ash Wednesday in ‘Walk with Me” a ‘Journey of Prayer for Lent’ which is promoted in our Parishes. The text continues: The Ashes “are a bold public testimony that we recognise that we are sinners, beggars before God, as we pray “God, have mercy on me a sinner”. They are also a sign of conversion and hope – “Repent and believe the Gospel”.

Lent then is an opportunity to take to heart the call to holiness we each receive, supported by the whole Catholic Community. This is the time before Lent begins to consider personally what we will do as part of that Community to renew our commitment to holiness through repentance and prayer in this holy season. Pollard writes “Ask God for the grace of appreciating the wonder, for it surely is that, of being chosen by Him to holiness in this life.”

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