



The 17th Sunday of the Year and World Youth Day: 30 July – 6 August

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Bless the Lord, O my soul and never forget all his benefits” (Psalm 102:2)

On Wednesday this week I celebrated Mass with a group of Pilgrims from my former Parish, St George and St Teresa, Dorridge. We were praying for one of our number, who had died recently. I recalled our first Pilgrimage to Rome in 2013 and in particular our visit to St Mary Major Basilica, the Dedication of which is celebrated in the coming week on 5th August. My first Mass in St George and St Teresa on becoming Parish Priest was on that date in 2001. More importantly, Pope Francis will go to the Chapel in the Basilica where the famous Icon of Mary “Salvation of the Roman People” is honoured, to pray as he begins his visit to World Youth Day, starting on 1st August in Lisbon, Portugal. It is a big occasion with young people coming from all over the world. Pope Francis will be asking Mary’s Intercession for its success, just as our Pilgrim Group had gone before her image to ask her prayers for Blessings on our First Pilgrimage.

Pope Francis has chosen the words from St Luke’s Gospel *“Mary arose and went with haste”* in the account of the Visitation to focus the World Youth Day gathering. The young people are to have a purpose to their celebration of their Catholic Faith in Lisbon: just as Mary was in haste celebrating the coming Birth of the Child Jesus with her cousin Elizabeth and the forthcoming birth of John the Baptist, so young people should go in haste to share the discovery of the Pearl of Great Price, the Kingdom of God centered on Christ, with the world today.

In his message for World Youth Day which was released on August 15th last year, Pope Francis wrote:

“To experience the presence of the Risen Christ in our lives, to encounter Him ‘alive’, is the greatest spiritual joy, an explosion of light that can leave no one untouched. Mary sets out immediately, anxious to bring the news to others, to bear witness to the joy of this encounter”.

The Gospel for the 17th Sunday has an image for the Kingdom of Heaven: Jesus says *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field”*. Joseph Pollard in *“Finding Fresh Light”* quotes Barclay the Scripture Scholar who says the image of the man finding treasure in a field is very apt for Our Lord’s time. People did not have banks then.... they put their large coins and gold ornaments into earthen pots in the ground. These pots were common. You remember the Parable of the Talents, and the servant

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who did not invest his master's money but buried it. He first put it in a pot in the ground for safe keeping! He was too afraid to invest it.

Sometimes, people died and left unclaimed pots after them. The whereabouts of some of the pots faded with the passing of the years. That is why treasure hunting was quite common in Our Lord's time. The emphasis in the story in the Gospel is on the joy of the man who found the pot of treasure. Our Lord is telling us we should be ecstatic at finding our place in the Kingdom of God.

This week in our Burning Bush Vlog we have chosen a Greek Icon of the second coming to express the fullness of the Kingdom at the end of time. Christ is enthroned in the centre surrounded by angels and saints. Paradise is at the bottom, with the Bosom of Abraham (left) and the Good Thief (right) holding his cross.

Pollard writes: *"There are many pearls in our lives: our spouse; our children; or girl or boy friend; our country; our landscape; our books; our music; our sports; and even our fine wines. Our Lord is not denying any of these. He is simply putting our graced life in Him at the centre of our string of pearls. It is the pearl above all pearls"*.

Pope Francis is encouraging young people, and indeed all of us, not to keep the treasure of the Kingdom to ourselves but to follow the example of Mary; quoting St Ambrose of Milan in his commentary on the Gospel of St Luke:

Mary set out in haste towards the hills *"because she rejoiced in the promise and sought to serve others with the enthusiasm born of her joy.... the grace of the Holy Spirit permits no delay"*.

I conclude with the ending of the Pope's message for World Youth Day: *"Like Mary, let us 'arise and go in haste'. Let us carry Jesus within our hearts, and bring Him to all those whom we meet! In this beautiful season of our lives, press ahead and do not postpone all the good that the Holy Spirit can accomplish in you!"*.

This is a wonderful call to the young people journeying to Portugal, and a call to all of us this coming week.

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