



The Fourteenth Week of the Year and Apostleship of the Sea 9th July 2023

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

***“I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11)***

Yesterday evening I went to meet the daughter of a West Indian lady I first met in Holy Souls, Acocks Green, about 50 years ago. I have been asked to be Celebrant at her Mum’s Requiem because of that first meeting where I showed interest in her Mum which led her to continue in the Catholic Church throughout the rest of her life. She came to the West Indian Chaplaincy which I went on to set up in 1974 in Aston, Birmingham. I have gone on to different roles in the Archdiocese, and haven’t kept in touch, but it was that initial welcome that led her Mum to a deeper love of the Eucharist, where she felt she “touched God”. I was moved by that story and the fact that other priests and lay people had kept her in touch with the Holy Eucharist in the Chaplaincy and her Parish, not least in St Ambrose Barlow, Hall Green where special Ministers of the Eucharist had taken Holy Communion to her at her daughter’s home in more recent years as her health declined.

I am reminded of the Holy Father’s Intention for July (always drawn to our attention on the eve of the First Friday when we honour the Sacred Heart of Jesus) *“We pray that Catholics may place the Celebration of the Eucharist at the heart of their lives, transforming human relationships in a very deep way and opening to the encounter with God and all their brothers and sisters”*. The Pope’s Intentions are entrusted to the entire Catholic Church through the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network. This month it is beautifully unpacked and presented by the Archdiocese of Detroit in a Pope Video for the month of July.

Because it is Sea Sunday this weekend I have to draw attention to the conversion of William Bernard Ullathorne, who later became our first Catholic Bishop of Birmingham; he went to sea at the age of 15 and it was a fellow-seaman who took him to the Catholic Church at the Port of Klaipėda at the Baltic Sea. When I was in Lithuania some years ago I set out in search of the Church: the importance of the story is that this marked the beginning of Ullathorne’s conversion. It speaks to us again of the importance of the Eucharist and the role of a layman of Faith in the life of the young seaman, who was searching for his way in life. It is a good story to tell on Sea Sunday when we support in prayer and donations the work of the Apostleship of the Sea, which does so much to befriend seamen from many parts of the world who come to our shores, often after a long time at sea, and away from home, in need of a welcoming hand.

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The Church is where the welcome spoken of in the Gospel this Sunday is to be found:

*“Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest”.*

The words of Jesus in the Gospel go on to challenge us *“Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart”.*

The image of the yoke brings back memories for me: I am old enough to remember going to my Grandparents Farm in Ireland and seeing two horses pulling the plough with a double yoke to till the field. Soon that image was to go with the tractors and other mechanisation. As Jesus was in the care of the carpenter Joseph, the tradition has grown up (not unreasonably) that he would have helped make yokes for animals. Then, the spiritual application of this: if we are to take on the person of Jesus in our daily life, the journey is going to be much easier with His walking by our side.

Not only that: Jesus is meek and humble of heart and will find rest for our souls. Earlier in this Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was confronting the religious leaders who made the lives of the people a burden: the 10 Commandments had been translated for them as 613 precepts. In contrast, the way of Jesus is presented as uncomplicated and even restful. His “way” is the fulfilment of the Prophet Zechariah’s words in the first reading for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday. Finding Him is to find the one who leads us to *“Rejoice heart and soul”*, especially in His presence with us now in the Holy Eucharist. Let us treasure this gift; the “Real Presence”; and share it with others.

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