



20th Week of the Year and Bl. Dominic Barberi 20 – 26 August 2023

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“With the Lord there is mercy; in Him is plentiful Redemption”

As I write this Reflection I am conscious that the Diocesan Novena for the Canonisation of Blessed Dominic Barberi begins tomorrow Friday, 18th August and extends to the Feast on Saturday of the coming week 26th August. The story of Blessed Dominic’s time in the Archdiocese is outlined on the Diocesan website: it is an extraordinary story of how an Italian Passionist fell in love with England and gave his life to bringing our people back to the Faith: he spent seven years based at Aston Hall in Staffordshire, from where he celebrated Mass, preached missions, heard confessions, and received many people into the Catholic Church, the most famous being St John Henry Newman on October 1845. Dominic felt blessed: he wrote, *“What a spectacle it was for me to see Newman at my feet! All that I have suffered since I left Italy has been well compensated by this event. I hope the effects of such a conversion may be great.”*

Newman had asked Dominic, whose holiness of life impressed him, to hear his confession and receive him into the Church which he did in 1845 at Littlemore in Oxford. Dominic’s English was apparently never very great and he received much ridicule. However, we would be mistaken to think of him as anything but academically very able, as is evident in his writings. Bl. Dominic was a great Apostle of England and Broderick noted, referring to the courageous Passionist who suffered ridicule and hostility in his mission:

“The second spring did not begin when Newman was converted nor when the hierarchy was restored. It began on a bleak October day of 1841, when a little Italian priest in comical attire shuffled down a ship’s gangway at Folkstone.”

In my present role as Co-Ordinator of Ethnic Chaplaincies I am conscious of the challenge our priests from abroad face in the use of English when it is not their first language; I hope they take courage from Blessed Dominic, who achieved so much in his mission in our land. His remains and Shrine are in St Helen’s in Merseyside, in the Church of St Anne and Blessed Dominic. Traditionally there is a Mass there on the Bank Holiday Monday after the Feast – this year 28 August at 12 noon celebrated by Bishop Thomas Neylon.

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Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Central to Bl. Dominic's Ministry was the Sacrament of Penance, also known sometimes as the Sacrament of Mercy. I was reminded of this as I read the Gospel for the 20th Sunday: a famous passage from St Matthew's Gospel about the Canaanite woman who pleaded with Jesus for healing of her daughter. It raises the question of the mission of Jesus being first to the Jewish people and then through them to the wider world: I found Father Pollard's commentary on this passage most helpful.

"We find in the ministry of Jesus something I like to call the gospel of the exceptions. These exceptions are the instances where our Lord is 'made' to do things that are not in his pre-planned agenda. For example, he works his first miracle ahead of schedule at the request of his mother for the young newly-weds who run out of wine on their great day. In today's gospel, he chooses to make a Gentile woman part of God's household even though the apostolate to the Gentiles, a task for Paul and the others, is still several years away in the future.

We have here, according to Barclay, an incident where compassion calls to compassion. The woman is pleading for her daughter, not for herself. Her persistence proves the depth of her compassion for her child. Her persistence is also a grammar of trust and faith. She begins with a social courtesy (first calling Jesus 'sir'). Next, she gives him a Jewish Messianic title ('Son of David'). Finally, she acknowledges him as 'Lord'.

If you and I have persistent faith in Our Lord, as this Canaanite woman had, then it doesn't matter how impossible our request may seem. The Canaanite woman assures us that our faith and trust will find their appropriate level, and their appropriate response, in the seemingly bottomless well of the Lord's compassion."

One of the outstanding places we experience the Lord's compassion is in the Sacrament of Confession which is often put in the category of a "healing sacrament" alongside the Anointing of the Sick. Confession, Reconciliation, Penance: all refer to this Sacrament, and so does "Mercy" because it is above all about love – the boundless love of the Lord for us. I am reminded of a post on Facebook where St Mother Teresa is quoted as saying: *"we can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair and helplessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread, but there are many more dying for a little love"*. The Sacrament of Confession reminds us that God's mercy is infinite: that is where the Church reaches out to us in love to heal us.

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Ethnic Chaplaincies

Writing of the Sacrament of Confession Newman said *“Oh what piercing, heart-subduing tranquility, provoking tears of joy, is poured, almost substantially and physically upon the soul, the oil of gladness, as Scripture calls it, when the penitent at length rises, his God reconciled to him, his sins rolled away for ever!”*

Present Position of Catholics in England,
351-352 (1851)

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