



29th Week of the Year: World Mission Sunday 22 October 2023

Reflection: Mgr Daniel McHugh

***“Hearts on Fire, Feet on the Move”***

(Theme for World Mission Sunday)

On Monday night 16<sup>th</sup> October as I was closing down for the day, but with BBC 24 Hour News streaming in the background on the shocking events in Israel and Gaza; my attention was grabbed by a Mother, whose son had been killed, speaking to a reporter. She was saying: *“I don’t want revenge and killing in my name. I have lost my only son; I speak as a mother: teach these people to love and to heal.”* I was so struck that I made a hurried note of what she said. In the midst of voices calling for war and revenge her words stood out. She didn’t want other mothers going through her agony.

Then, today, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> October, after the General Audience, Pope Francis with a statement saying: *“Take just one side in this conflict, the side of peace.”* I can still remember the Pope walking down the street in Rome to the Church of the Miraculous Crucifix that brought healing at the time of a plague some hundreds of years ago. It was taken to St Peter’s Basilica where it stood at the front alongside the Icon of Our Lady Salus Populi Romani. The image many people across the world will recall there is of the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament the Pope gave the whole world as we all stood in fear of Covid.

Now as we stand in fear again of the possibility of the terrible war underway in Israel-Gaza and its potential to spill over into a wider regional conflict that could engulf the wider world, Pope Francis turns to prayer once more: he announces a Day of Fasting and Prayer of Friday 27 October, inviting those of other religions and anyone with a heart for peace to participate however they see fit. He writes *“May weapons be silenced, and let us heed the cry for peace of the poor, the people, the children .... war does not solve any problem: it sows only death and destruction, ferments hate, proliferates revenge.”*

He asked local Churches to organize activities of prayer on the day. He concludes: *“That evening at 18:00 at St Peter’s we will spend an hour of prayer in a spirit of penance to implore peace in our time, peace in the world. I ask all the particular churches to participate by arranging similar activities involving the People of God.”*

It is usual for the Pope to choose a theme for World Mission Sunday: this year 22 October the theme would have been chosen some time ago: “Hearts on Fire, Feet on the Move” based on St Luke Chapter 24: 13-35. This is the journey to the village called Emmaus, which is normally read at Sunday Mass just after Easter: it is an encounter for 2 disciples with Jesus Risen from the Dead. At first they did not recognise Him, though He explained the Scriptures to them that were about Himself. The disciples were

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese

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despondent after the Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord. Then Jesus joined them for a meal: it was when he broke the bread and said the Blessing that they recognised who it was, but He vanished from their sight. Then St Luke writes “they said to each other, *“Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road, and explained the Scriptures to us”*. They set off instantly to all the Apostles and their companions who said to them, *“Yes it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon (Peter).”*

Mission Today, the magazine published by “Missio” which continues the vital work of The Association for the Propagation of the Faith (APF) has an abridged version of the Holy Father’s Message for Mission Sunday. Missio has also published Homily Notes for Mission Sunday, and promoters of the “Red Box” have received an abridged version of those; there I read *“Pope Francis reminds us that wherever we are in the world, “The primary and principal resource of mission are those persons who have come to know the Risen Christ in the Scriptures and the Eucharist, who carry his fire in their heart and his light in their gaze. They can bear witness to the life that never dies, even in the most difficult of situations and in the darkest of moments.”*

The Peace that the Risen Lord brought to the Apostles and Disciples is our treasure from our encounter with Him in the Eucharist. Mission Sunday and the Day for Peace in the Holy Land on the 27 October provides us with a time of grace to express solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are living in situations of poverty, violence and oppression, not least those who are caught up in the horror of the war in Israel and Gaza. May they all come to know the Peace that Jesus alone can give; and may world leaders find a way to peace in all areas of conflict.

May we all join the mother whose son has died in the Israel-Gaza conflict *“I speak as mother: teach these people to love and to heal.”*

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