



31st Week of the Year and “Laudate Deum” (Praise God) – 5 November 2023

Reflection: Mgr Daniel McHugh

***“Lord: you will show me the path of life and fill me with joy in your presence”***

Communion Antiphon

(31<sup>st</sup> Sunday)

When I was thinking of my Reflection for the 31<sup>st</sup> week I had in mind the importance of including an introduction to “Laudate Deum” (Praise God) which is the title of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis published on the 4<sup>th</sup> October, the date of the beginning of the Synod (which I introduced in a Reflection a few weeks ago). 4<sup>th</sup> October is the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, and I am sure it was no accident that the Apostolic Exhortation and the Synod were launched on that day. I had planned to make a short visit to Rome and Assisi at this time; I came as the first phase of the Synod ended (28<sup>th</sup> October) and I made my way to Assisi on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> concelebrating Mass at the Basilica of St Mary and the Angels - where the Saint welcomed the first brothers forming the Order of the Franciscans in 1209: it is called the Portiuncula, a beautiful Chapel within the huge Basilica built later. Here it was in 1211 that St Clare took the religious habit too and founded the Poor Clares. Nearby is the “Transito” or small Chapel built over the place where Francis died on 3 October 1226. Here St Francis wrote the final verse of the Canticle of Brother Sun, and blessed his brothers for the last time.

The first chapel dedicated to St Mary of the Angels was probably built here in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century and the Benedictine Monks transformed it into the present Church in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century. The name ‘Portiuncula’ means: “a little part” and indicates the portion of ground where the Church was built. St Bonaventure wrote *“He (St Francis) loved this more than all other places in the world. Here he humbly began; here he progressed in virtue; here he happily arrived at his fulfilment”*.

Pope Francis, like all of us, has been inspired by the Canticle of the Sun, also known as Canticle of the Creatures, a religious song composed by St Francis of Assisi. It is an affirmation of Francis’ personal Theology – as he often referred to animals as brothers and sisters to mankind, rejected material accumulation and sensual comforts in favour of “Lady Poverty”. Francis is said to have composed most of the Canticle in late 1223 while recovering from an illness in San Damiano. I quote the English Translation at the end of the Reflection. In 2015 Pope Francis issued his Encyclical ‘Laudato Si’ on climate change and degradation of the environment, addressing questions such as pollution, industrial waste, the destruction of the environment, and escalating global warming. Eight years later the Holy Father has issued the Apostolic Exhortation “Laudate Deum”: *“to all peoples of good will on the climate crisis”*. The opening words are the message of

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St Francis of Assisi *"Praise God for all his creatures"*, and he goes on to refer to *Laudato Si* as an Encyclical Letter where *"I wanted to share with all of you, my brothers and sisters of our suffering planet, my heartfelt concerns about the care of our common home"*. The Pope goes on to say: *"with the passage of time, I have realised that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point .... It is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. We feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, forced migrations etc. This is a global social issue and one intimately related to the dignity of human life"*. He goes on to quote the Bishops of the United States *"our care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together .... the effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world"*.

In the Gospel for the 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday Jesus extends this message beyond the Scribes and Pharisees to all of us – they proclaim their belief in the love of God and neighbour by wearing Phylacteries and Tassels. Are we any better – less hypocritical – in proclaiming love of God and neighbour while taking part in practices that harm "our common home"?

Following my visit to Saint Mary of the Angels, I went to San Rufino, the Cathedral Church of Assisi, where St Francis and St Clare were baptised. Pope Francis continues to remind us that Baptism is at the heart of our common calling to be brothers and sisters of Jesus – now being lived out in a Synodal Church. Then my pilgrimage day took me to San Francesco where the Saints Tomb is to be found in the Lower Church: many were in prayer before his remains and I joined them there.

Finally I stood in admiration once more of the great Giotto paintings of the Life of Francis in the Upper Church. May his life inspire all of us on our journey.

Here is the Canticle of the Sun:

Most High, all powerful, good Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,  
especially through my lord Brother Sun,  
who brings the day; and you give light through him.  
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

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Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene,  
and every kind of weather through which you give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful  
and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains us and governs us and who produces  
varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,  
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace  
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,  
from whom no living man can escape.  
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.  
Blessed are those who will find Your most holy will,  
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks  
and serve Him with great humility.

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