



18th Week of the Year 4th August 2024
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“You must put aside your old self, which gets corrupted by following illusory desires”
(Ephesians 4)

As I was driving into Birmingham, Wednesday 31 July, I was listening to the excited commentary on the Olympics: Team G.B. was doing very well indeed, it looked like we would take an unexpected bronze in the diving! As you may know, things have got far better with a gold and silver won. Sadly, not all has gone well with the Olympics especially with the Opening Ceremony: the weather, as we know was not good; it had been decided to bring on the athletes in boats in the River Seine rather than the more usual entrance into the main stadium. Travelling down the River Seine took longer than usual, which led to the “Parade” of Athletes being filled with many cultural segments of uneven quality. Most controversial was a scene featuring a group of drag queens involved in a pagan feast/orgy from Greek Mythology and mimicking Leonardo da Vinci’s “The Last Supper”. The ‘Organiser’, a Thomas Jolly said “*we have many rights in France, including not to be worshippers.*” They admitted Leonardo’s painting inspired the skit. The outcome of this saw many Catholics and others in solidarity with us protesting about this lack of respect for a central part of our Faith, the Last Supper, where Jesus gives us the Bread of Life (reflected on in St John’s Gospel Chapter 6, being read in these Sunday’s of Ordinary Time). The French Bishops wrote on the day following the Opening Ceremony:

“Last night’s opening ceremony, organised by French COJOP, offered the world a marvellous display of beauty and joy, rich in emotion and universally acclaimed.

This ceremony, unfortunately, included scenes of mockery and derision of Christianity, which we deeply regret. We would like to thank the members of other religious denominations who have expressed their solidarity with us.

This morning, we are thinking of all the Christians on every continent who have been hurt by the outrageousness and provocation of certain scenes. We want them to understand that the Olympic celebration goes far beyond the ideological biases of a few artists.

Sport is a wonderful human activity that deeply delights the hearts of athletes and spectators alike. Olympism is a movement at the service of this reality of human unity and

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fraternity. Now, its time to take to the field, and may it bring truth, consolation, and joy to all!

The Internet showed a gathering of thousands in Paris proclaiming their Faith in song, with a huge poster 'Jesu T'aime – Jesus Loves You.' (this scene is now subject to verification) That love is at the heart of the Eucharist, and we are celebrating it with the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress taking place in Quito, the Ecuadorian Capital 8-15 September. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales says on its website: An International Eucharistic Congress aims *"to make known, love and better serve our Lord Jesus Christ in his Eucharistic Mystery, the centre of our Catholic life and the heartbeat of our mission to heal the wounds of the world."* "Adoremus" at Oscott on 14 September with representation of all Dioceses in England and Wales has been scheduled to coincide with the International Congress in Quito. On Sunday 15 September Parishes, Chaplaincies, Eparchies and Missions will celebrate the love of Jesus in the Eucharist at Mass, with Adoration and special prayers of Thanksgiving. Further, young people will gather on 15 September at Oscott for a Day of invocation before the Blessed Sacrament and Reflection on Vocation. In the Archdiocese of Birmingham this is being organised by Kenelm our Youth Organisation; all dioceses will again send representatives.

For us Jesus is indeed the Bread of Life. In the Gospel for the 18th Sunday Jesus challenges the crowd/challenges us to go beyond the fulfilment of material needs to seek Him because He can lead us to eternal life: *"He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst."* Little wonder we are led, for the sake of our children, to protest at scenes of mockery and derision of Christianity, and in particular at mockery of the Eucharist.

This coming week we have a Memorial that appeals to me especially: the Memorial of the Dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major in Rome. Our Diocesan Ordo/Calendar of Feasts and Memorials has this explanation: "After the declaration of the dogma of the divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin in the Council of Ephesus (431), Pope Sixtus III dedicated this Basilica in Rome in honour of the Mother of God. It was later called 'St Mary Major'. It is considered the oldest church in the west dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is also held that about a century earlier Pope Liberius had built a Basilica of Our Lady on this site on the occasion of a miraculous fall of snow on 5 August so the St Mary Major Basilica was an embellishment of the Liberian building. Many Churches in the Alps are dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows, and the Chapel and former Convent at Palazzola were dedicated to Our Lady of the Snow in the 12th Century (Palazzola is the summer house of the English College, Rome, where I was a student).

Pope Francis goes to St Mary Major to pray at an image of Our Lady before and after his Apostolic Journeys to other countries, and it's said he wishes to be buried there. Let us ask Mary's prayers that we may remain faithful to the Holy Eucharist, the Bread of Life given to us by Jesus for our journey in Faith.

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