



25th Week in Ordinary Time and the Feast of Our Lady of Walsingham 22 and 24 September 2024

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

The Lord Upholds My Life (Psalm 53)

Tuesday next 24 September is the Feast of Our Lady of Walsingham and my 57th Ordination Anniversary. I remember well creating a card to commemorate the Day: it had a Cross on the front designed after the Cross of Nails in Coventry Cathedral and a quote from Scripture *"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."* I was setting those words at the centre of my ideal for priestly life.

On the 25th Sunday in the Gospel Jesus spells out to His disciples, what *"giving His life"* will mean, and they don't understand. Instead they have been arguing about who is to be the greatest in a kingdom of their imagining. Jesus tells them they must be servants; Jesus then calls a child and teaches the Twelve that to receive a child in Jesus' name is to receive both Jesus and the one who sent him. The Loyola Press Commentary says this *"We might easily fail to understand the significance of this action. In first century Palestine, children were without status or power, possessing no legal rights. In this action, Jesus is teaching his disciples and us that when we serve the least among us, we serve Jesus himself. Who are the people without power and status in our society that Jesus is calling us to serve?"*

Joseph Pollard in his book of Homilies 'Finding Fresh Light' quotes Wilfred Harrington the Scripture scholar who notes that the Aramaic word used by Jesus for the child in the story is 'Talya'. It is also the word for servant. Our Lord links the two meanings of the word. The child represents the least and most vulnerable in the community. A true disciple of Jesus 'receives' the child, i.e. accepts the responsibility of service to the least and most vulnerable. For it is in serving the least that one is the greatest in the Kingdom of God.

As I reflect on the words of Pollard I am aware of the challenge once more of this Sunday's Gospel and the ideal I had set myself as a Priest. If we think of children for a moment – not to mention vulnerable adults – I ask myself *"do I do enough to support those campaigning for the rights of the unborn?"* In the US we see a divided society, we hear of women's rights, and quite rightly, but surely not at the expense of discarding children! And here in the UK are we shy to stand up for the unborn? The Church has been seriously wounded too by the weakness of some Priests especially indulging/promoting child pornography. While hope and forgiveness are central for all

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in the coming Jubilee Year, and we thank God for that, a Gospel like that of the 25th Sunday reminds us strongly of where we must stand if we are to be the servants Jesus has called us to be.

As I reflect on 57 years of priesthood my eyes fall on the words of the Responsorial Psalm for the 25th Sunday "*The Lord upholds my life*" and I look back on how He has supported me. I see His upholding my life especially in the Holy Eucharist: it has been in the Mass, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament that my priesthood has been sustained. It is here, particularly in the Scriptures and Memorials and Church teachings that God speaks to me, guides my journey in Faith and sustains me with His Grace. And, because I know how vital the encounter with Our Lord is for me, know that I desire to reach out to others with that experience.

I also see the Lord upholding me through the presence of Our Lady in the Church. Her "yes" to God's will is highlighted at the Shrine of the Annunciation of Our Lady of Walsingham. Her special presence there is celebrated on my Ordination Anniversary 24 September, and she stands with us, 'upholds' us with her prayer and example, particularly this year when Augustinian Canons return to Walsingham after 500 years, is one of Faith prevailing over attack and persecution. Pilgrimage to Walsingham has featured throughout my life as a Priest, and prayer to Mary together with prayer before the Blessed Sacrament has sustained me each day.

Celebrating the Anniversary of Ordination to Priesthood is a special opportunity to renew the ideal of service expressed on my Ordination Card and to pray in the Eucharist and to Our Lady for the Grace to go forward with that ideal in an ever changing Church in an ever changing world!

Our Lady of Walsingham pray for us.

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