



26th Week of the year 29 September
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

The Challenge of the Gospel – a shared mission

The Prayer intention given by Pope Francis for the upcoming month of October is *“For a shared mission: we pray that the Church continue to sustain in all ways a synodal lifestyle, as a sign of co-responsibility, promoting the participation, the communion and the mission shared among priests, religious and lay people.”* It is a wonderful ideal, but we know that working together, living together, sharing together, is not always easy. In preparing the Burning Bush vlog for this week we chose a picture of St Therese of Lisieux whose Feast is this coming Wednesday 1st October because she is a good model for us in this process. I remember reading her book *“The Story of a Soul”* years ago: she found living in a community a challenge, not every Sister was easy to get on with. The answer to that challenge comes out in her poem ‘All my life love’. Interestingly the Pope’s Prayer Intention for the month comes in time for the First Friday when we honour the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I can’t think of a better intention to have before us at First Friday Mass than the Synodal Church which can only be effective when underpinned by the love of Jesus in the heart of each of us. Let us ask the Intercession of St Therese in this regard.

We look to the Gospel especially when we reflect on the Mission of the Church Community. On Sunday 29th September the Gospel for the 26th Week Year B has some challenges for us here: we are continuing our reading from St Mark’s Gospel and last week we recall Jesus highlighted the child, often considered least in the community in those days, to emphasise that it is in serving the least that we become great in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus goes on to say as recorded in Chapter 9 of St Mark that anyone *“who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who has faith would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck.”* Father Joseph Pollard in his commentary on this section of the Gospel says Our Lord’s talk about cutting-off the hand or the leg or plucking out the eye if they lead us to sin, is only meant to stress the priority of living life according to God’s will and not our own. *“For our will is sin-prone....The vivid imagery that Jesus uses in relation to the hand and the leg and the eye is taken from the language of the rabbis of his time. Sin is not an act of the hand or the leg or the eye but of the will. The will simply uses the body as its agent in order to externalise its sin. Hence according to Barclay (the Scripture scholar), the rabbis had sayings that named the various parts which the will uses to materialise its sins. They said. “The eye and the heart are brokers of sin; the eye and the heart are the handmaids of sin.”* Pollard concludes *“Living our lives in Christ, and in the sure hope of glory, is worth the price of any sacrifice such living may require of us.”* Talk of price Pollard says is only used to emphasise the worth and the beauty and the inner joy of living with Christ.

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Another challenge for us in these days of the mission of the Church is that of seeing the Spirit of Christ at work not only in our own Catholic community but among others: Christian and non-Christian. This is a dimension of Church life that we see Pope Francis focus on especially in his Apostolic Journeys where he is keen not only to strengthen the Faith of the Catholic Church, but also seeks common cause with all those who are of goodwill and respect the human rights of others, living together in peace and justice. John in the Gospel for the 26th Sunday said to Jesus *“Master we saw a man who is not one of us casting out devils in your name; and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.”* Jesus says, *“You must not stop him.”* The choice of the first reading from the Old Testament on Sundays generally illustrates a key point in the Gospel of the day. This is so on the 26th Sunday where the Old Testament Book of Numbers recounts the Lord speaking to Moses in the cloud and put some of His Spirit of Prophecy on others including ‘outsiders’. Joshua appeals to Moses to stop them: Moses responds, *“If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets, and the Lord gave his Spirit to them all.”*

Fr Ferlita in his commentary concludes *“The just, the good, the true, let them live wherever they are found.”*

Sometimes this is a challenge for the Church community! We can be more comfortable thinking we have a monopoly on truth, but it seems to me seeing and giving thanks for the Spirit of the Lord Jesus working in others is a special challenge of our mission in these days. That way can lead to peace and unity in a fractured world.

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