



29th Week of the Year – World Mission Day - 20 October 2024

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Go and invite everyone to the banquet” (Matthew 22:9)

Last week I was in the Ring of Kerry for a few days with my sister as part of a celebration leading up to her 80th Birthday. We had been there years ago with our parents on holiday and it was revisiting and recalling past happy times. We stayed just outside the Ring itself at a little place called Kilmakilloge on the Beara Peninsula. It is named after St Kilian who had a monastery there to prepare for mission. Quite by accident we came across the spot where he left for the mission with eleven others in the year 686. His boat was made of hide covering a wooden frame and reminded me of the story of Brendan the Navigator whose missionary activity took him to the States in a similar boat, long before Columbus. Kilian and his companions received missionary faculties from the Pope with the target being Würzburg in Bavaria, present day Germany. He converted Duke Gozbert and a large number of his subjects to Christianity. However, his preaching included telling the Duke Herzog that his marriage arrangements were in violation of the Scriptures. Geilana, his wife, in the absence of the Duke, had her soldiers track down Kilian and two of his co-missionaries to the square in Würzburg where they were preaching and had him beheaded. A wonderful statue of Kilian stands there today and on his feast day 8 July his relics are paraded through the streets. Meanwhile, in Kilmakilloge, dancing takes place on the pier from where boats go out to fish today. The great missionaries of those days remain an inspiration, and we recall their zeal on days like World Mission Day, 20 October.

What was it that drove them on at great personal risk to their lives? Part of the answer must be the discovery we made on our journey around the Ring of Kerry. It was at a place called Waterville on the coast. At a parking area by a golf course we discovered that this course boasted a “Mass-Hole” by the 12th Tee. When the Golf Course was being worked on this piece of “Sacred” ground was preserved by the men working to construct the course who refused to harm it. I had heard of Mass-Rocks used for secret Masses in Ireland during Penal Times (1691-1760). In those days the ideal politically was to entice the colonized Irish to conversion to Protestantism, but as in England in Reformation Times when Masses were celebrated in great houses where “Priest-Hides” are still to be found today (as in our local Harvington Hall) people and priests were ready to risk all for the Eucharist. In the case of the Mass-Hole at Waterville Golf Course, the priest was captured, imprisoned on the prison-ship offshore and martyred: Love of Christ in the Eucharist has been at the heart of many missionaries’ lives.

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In his message for World Mission Day 2024 Pope Francis says: *“Mission, we see, is a tireless going out to all men and women, in order to invite them to encounter God and enter into communion with him.....The Church, for her part, in fidelity to the mission she has received from the Lord, will continue to go to the ends of the earth, to set out over and over again, without ever growing weary or losing heart in the face of difficulties and obstacles.....May all of us, the baptised, be ready to set out anew, each according to our state in life, to navigate a new missionary movement, as at the dawn of Christianity!”*

The Gospel for the 29th Sunday of the Year (20th October) continues reading from St Mark’s Gospel about Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, and highlights the sacrifice, and suffering involved in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The end of the Gospel passage has those wonderful words of Jesus: *“For the Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a reason for many.”* (Mark 10:45). The Loyola Press commentary has this observation: *“Following Jesus’ example of sacrificial love it continues to be countercultural in our day as well”*. I am encouraged not just by stories from the past, but also from the present: so many witnessing to the way of Christ in their care for those in need at home and abroad. However, Mission Sunday – as the Pope says with reference to the Synod in Rome *“seeks to refocus the Church on her primary task, which is the preaching of the Gospel in today’s world.”* I often reflect in my current role as Co-ordinator of Ethnic Chaplaincies how blessed we are to have generous missionary priests, from many parts of the world, sharing and supporting our Mission here at home particularly through provision of the Sacraments, not least the Eucharist. Many of them will have had our support, and that of the Church worldwide, through Missio. Fr Anthony Chantry, the National Director, writes: *“World Mission Sunday is our chance to share in love and solidarity with our brothers and sisters overseas. In offering our prayers, we join with missionaries everywhere in communion and compassion, supporting them in spreading the good news. By giving a donation, we respond to Christ’s call to share our faith in him so that all may experience God’s love.”*

“Go and invite everyone to the banquet” – we can all play our part in responding to these words of Our Lord.

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