



**“This is the hour for love”**  
**[Pope Leo XIV at the Mass for his Inauguration]**

Reflection for 6<sup>th</sup> Week of Easter and the Ascension of the Lord 25 May 2025  
by Mgr Daniel McHugh

*“I am with you always, to the end of the age”* [Matthew 25:20 The Ascension of the Lord]

Those of us who had the opportunity to watch the Inauguration Mass of Pope Leo on Sunday last, 18 May, will have noticed not only the presence of many Cardinals, Bishops and Priests as well as thousands upon thousands of the Faithful in St Peter's Square, but also the striking presence of so many Eastern Rite Concelebrants wearing their unique vestments and headdress. As I write this I can look across at the mounted picture on my wall where I stand next to Fr Solomon, the Eritrea Chaplain in our Archdiocese. The special Liturgical Rite he celebrates is the Alexandrian Rite: he wears a flowing cape and a Fez-like hat. Much of the Mass is chanted in a language familiar to his Eritrean Community but unknown to us of the Latin Rite who use the Roman Missal.

In the Jubilee Year there have been many different celebrations in Rome and one of those has been the Jubilee of the Eastern Churches. Pope Leo met with the 5000 participants on Wednesday 14 May in the Paul VI Hall. There he spoke of the Eastern Rites as *“a treasure for the Church....that must be preserved”*. He spoke too of the need to preserve them amid other cultures. He recalled that many of the faithful live in contexts of war and religious prosecution and are forced to leave their homelands. He went on *“However, due to the difficulty of finding communities that celebrate the same rite, they risk not only losing their homeland but also their religious identity.”*. The Pope said: *“We embrace the call to protect the Christian East, especially in the diaspora”*. This is something we are doing in the Archdiocese through supporting priests, like Fr Solomon in his special ministry to the Eritrean Community.

More recently, the wider Catholic Community has been involved in the welcome of Ukrainians following the Russian invasion of their country. A number of them are from the Ukrainian Eastern Byzantine Rite, and more than one of our host parishes have opened their doors to Mass in this Rite across the Archdiocese. Pope Leo highlighted the richness of Eastern Liturgy and the contribution it can make to the West. He recalled that Eastern faithful, living in contexts of violence, war and persecution, are those who most genuinely sing words of hope. He also recalled that Pope Francis once referred to them as *“Martyr Churches”*.

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We noted in the very first address from the Balcony of St Peter's Basilica the new Pope's commitment to Peace. On the occasion of – speaking to the Eastern Churches – he returned to this theme saying *“The Peace of Christ is not the deadly silence that follows conflict, nor the result of oppression. It is a gift that restores people and reactivates life. Let us pray for this peace – a peace that is reconciliation, forgiveness, the courage to turn the page and start again.”*

Leo XIV concluded his address by thanking the faithful of the Eastern Rites and expressing his wish for them to be open, transparent, and a united Church. He said: *“Thank-you, thank-you dear brothers and sisters of the East, from where Jesus, the Sun of Justice, rose to make us ‘lights of the world’ [Mt. 5:14]. Continue shining through faith, hope and charity – and nothing else.”*

At his Inauguration Mass on Sunday last, 18 May, Pope Leo focused again on the theme of unity – this time in the wider Church. He said: *“Brothers and Sisters, I would like that our first great desire be for a united Church, a sign of unity and communion, which becomes a haven for a reconciled world”*. I have felt as I see posts coming through on X critical of Pope Francis and other Bishops in a way that is destructive, why not be open about our weaknesses in a way that helps build unity? A key phrase that struck me in the last Sunday's Homily by Pope Francis was: *“Brothers and Sisters this is the hour of love! The heart of the Gospel is the love of God that makes us brothers and sisters. With my predecessor Leo XIII, we can ask ourselves today: if this criterion “were to prevail in the world, would not every conflict cease and peace return?” [Rerum novarum, 21]*

We take heart as we hear the challenge of these words of Pope Leo when we reflect on the Gospel Acclamation for the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord:

*“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, says the Lord.  
I am with you always, to the end of the age.” [Acts 28: 19a-20b]*

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