



## **“A very dark day”**

Reflection for the 7th Week of Easter

by Mgr Daniel McHugh

*“Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God”*  
[Acts 7]

Weekly I prepare a Reflection which relates to the coming Sunday Scriptures and issues/events of the time: so that God’s word may throw light on them and give us a way of looking at them. On Monday I started thinking about Burning Bush: a vlog 10 mins for reflection and prayer with a reading from the coming Sunday’s Scripture; together with music/hymns, my reflection; and online adoration. As I started thinking/reflecting prayerfully it was the Memorial of St Philip Neri who founded the Oratory on the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

For a time he lived opposite the English College in Rome so he met the students a lot, his greeting to them was passed down to us [students of the College]:

### **Salavete flores martyrum - *Hail flowers of the Martyrs***

We were in the tradition of the Martyrs: in the College students in those days [1600s] were preparing to come back to England on the Mission. It was Reformation times and many were caught celebrating Mass and were martyred for their Faith, especially the Mass.

We had a huge picture in the Chapel of the College: we called it the Martyrs’ picture. When students heard the news that one of their number had died for the Faith in England they gathered before it to sing the Te Deum: a beautiful Hymn of Thanksgiving. On 26 May each year we went to the Church where the body of St Philip is entombed and joined in Mass for his Feast. We were reminded of those words of St Philip to those who had gone before us.

On Sunday coming which I was already thinking of on Monday, we hear in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles of the Martyrdom of St Stephen: a reading that would have inspired the early martyrs of the College. We recall Stephen was stoned for his preaching about Jesus Risen. Saul/Paul [later the great Apostle] was there holding the coats, approving what was taking place.

The reading from Acts tells us *“As they were stoning Stephen he called out: ‘Lord Jesus, receive my **spirit**.’ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep”*

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Now it is our turn to be witnesses to the new life of the Resurrection. The English College Martyrs lived in dark times. Stephen before them lived in persecution too. We may say we live in pagan times, times when people do not want to hear the good news of the Gospel. We pray with Stephen, do not hold that sin against them or even better the word of Jesus on the Cross *"Forgive them, they know not what they do"*.

As I continued my Reflection on Monday the news of events in Liverpool where joyous celebrations were taking place to mark the triumph of the football team in winning the Premier League came through – joy gave way to sadness and anger at the injuries inflicted by the car ramming incident. Commentators, politicians and the people of Liverpool struggled to find words to describe what had taken place. The Prime Minister described it as "a very dark day", though at the same time we saw how people came together to support and care for each other. The most awful adversity often brings out the best in people.

Listening to 'Thought for the Day' on BBC Radio 4 on Wednesday [28 May] I heard the speaker refer to St Paul in 2 Timothy 1:7 where he writes *"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."* The verse is a call to boldness and encourages Timothy, who was known for being a bit timid, to embrace God's empowering presence rather than dwelling on fear. One commentary reads: *"Paul's words suggest that God provides not a spirit of timidity but one of strength, love and sound judgement, which is essential for effective ministry."* The speaker was John Studzinski a business and charity leader who spoke of a car accident that left him filled with fear for his future. He speaks of a frightening world, and the need to look into our soul and find there the power to prevail. My mind turned to the upcoming celebration of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit: the day when the Apostles in the power of the Spirit went beyond their fear to live a new life witnessing to the power of God's Grace in their souls.

Fr. Ferlita, in his commentary on this great Feast, has the prayer which we make our own as we prepare for the celebration:

*"God, Our Father, from whom every good gift comes, send your spirit into our lives, into our world, through Christ your Son, the Gate you have opened and will never shut."*  
*Amen.*

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

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