



24th Week of Ordinary Time and the Season of Creation: 11th/12th September
Reflection/Homily by Mgr Daniel McHugh

The Voice of Creation

This past week I have been on Pilgrimage to the International Shrine of Our Lady, Knock in the West of Ireland. It was the first Ethnic Chaplaincies Pilgrimage from the Archdiocese of Birmingham and led by Archbishop Bernard Longley. There were many special moments to savour: one to recall, in the light of the Gospel for the 24th Sunday of the Year, was the Service of Penance and Confessions in the Chapel of Reconciliation. This beautiful Chapel is above all a place of healing where countless pilgrims encounter the compassion and mercy of God. Just as the father embraced the prodigal son in this Sunday's Gospel, so He embraces us in forgiveness in the great Sacrament of Penance. The booklet on Knock Shrine describes the Chapel as "beautifully constructed on a low site, which is of symbolic significance as the descent into the Chapel recalls the Rite of Baptism. The building has only a single shaft of natural light coming down through the high roof of the centre, which makes the colourful mosaic a central focus of light, brightness and hope". The mosaic was designed by Sr Angelica Ballan, Order of the Divine Master in Rome. We witnessed many pilgrims heading for this Chapel on their arrival in Knock; a special reminder that the Sacrament is highly valued on our Journey of Faith in these days. A few years ago, I gave two weeks of my time as a volunteer Priest in helping at the Shrine with Confessions twice a day as well as helping with Masses, Adoration, Anointing and other Devotions.

Reflecting now on the Service of Penance with its Examination of Conscience before Confessions, I realise it could have included reference to the "Season of Creation" which began on 1st September just two days before our Pilgrimage began. I had been to a beautiful part of Yorkshire, Nedderdale, on Bank Holiday Monday, 29th August, an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, at Fountains Abbey, a World Heritage Site and Brimham Rocks. I saw there commitment to care of the landscape and looking after it into the future; concern for managing the impact of flooding, adapting to climate change, conservation and biodiversity. My mind turned to the letter Pope Francis has written for the World Day of Prayer for Creation 1st September which began this year's Season of Creation, and runs to the 4th October, the Feast of St Francis. The theme this year is "Listen to the Voice of Creation." Pope Francis writes: "originally inspired by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, this season is an opportunity to cultivate our 'ecological conversion' ...if we learn how to listen, we can hear in the voice of Creation a kind of dissonance. On the one hand, we can hear a sweet song in praise of our beloved Creator; on the other, an anguished plea, lamenting our mistreatment of our common home."

Pope Francis goes on to explain the cry of anguish as "a chorus of cries of anguish. In the first place, it is our sister, mother earth, who cries out. Prey to our consumerist excesses, she weeps and implores us to put an end to our abuses and to her destruction."

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Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



He points to the “climate crisis” ...the impact of drought, flooding, hurricanes and heatwaves; then the impact of “predatory economic interests” on the lands of native people as a result of which they cry out. Finally, the plea of our children “feeling menaced by selfish and shortsighted actions.”

The Pope highlights the call of Our Lord “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2) requiring us to look again at our relationship with others and with creation. The second is “not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (Laudato Si, 217). It is “living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork.”

I conclude with the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation:

Pray with us:

Father, Lord of all creation,
we praise you with all your creatures
and the whole universe that comes forth from the work of Your hands.
We acknowledge the privilege and responsibility
that You give us as stewards of Your creation.
In our ignorance we have done damage to our common home
and our brothers and sisters are suffering.

Through faithfully following your Son
guide and direct us to prepare for a better future.
Teach us to contemplate You in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of You.

***Give us the grace to recognise, respect and protect all You have created,
using wisely all that you have entrusted to us.***

Holy Spirit,
who first hovered over the dawn of creation and drew order out of the chaos
***help us to build your kingdom of justice, love, peace and beauty where the poor of
the earth are crying out.***

You, who live and reign, world without end, Amen.

As we examine our conscience on living the Gospel, let us listen anew to “The Voice of Creation”.

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