



## Reflection for the 7<sup>th</sup> Week of Easter 24/25 May by Mgr Daniel McHugh

### We are not alone

When Sir Tom was knighted, he spoke in an interview about how the money he had raised might be used. The largest amount he hoped would be spent on those in nursing care, who are lonely. When his wife was ill, he had gone to see her daily. She said to him “If you didn’t come, I would be very lonely.” He said “many ladies in ‘care’ experience that: long hours on their own with no one to talk to.”

My mind went back to Mohammed Khalid, with whom I was involved in setting up the *Communitas Wellbeing Project* in inner City Birmingham; it was a joint initiative of Muslims and Catholics to support their respective “elderlies” as he used to call them. We had periodic reviews of the work, which involved visiting, education on health matters, and training in the use of computers as well as social get togethers, and joint events, where we exchanged experience and got to know about each other’s Faith. I remember learning from Khalid how the “elderlies” in the Muslim Community experience loneliness too, not so much because they live alone, but because they are excluded in family settings: ignored, thought irrelevant, not considered, especially by younger ones, when it comes to Family time. I spoke to him about what he did to remedy this: he talked about the importance of “communication” and, interestingly for us, how he advised them to pray because there they came close to God.

I mention this, particularly today, because one of the things Jesus says in the Gospel is “I will not leave you orphans, (says the Lord) I will come back to you and your hearts will be full of “joy”. The OT Psalm 26 in the Liturgy for this Sunday speaks of the House of God, as a place of refuge. Believers, as assailed by evil from all sides do not give in to fear, their trust and hope is placed in the Lord from whom they receive inner strength and peace.

Pope St John Paul II, whose Birthday we celebrated with the Mass of Pope Francis in St Peter’s on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May (the opening day for Churches in Italy), spoke of this Psalm in an Audience way back in April 2004. He said “If the Liturgy is the spiritual atmosphere in which the Psalm is immersed, the theme of prayer is trust in God, both in the day of joy, as well as in that of fear”. And, significantly, “The Faithful one .... is not alone and his heart retains an amazing interior peace.”

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That is something that our children, our families and “elderlies” should come to know if they do not already! Jesus says in the Gospel this Sunday “Father, the Hour has come, glorify your Son.” He was returning to His Father and sending the Holy Spirit so that he would remain with us. In the Alleluia verse we heard his words “I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you, and your hearts will be full of joy.” A new, more dramatic, presence than that in the Temple, the House of God in the OT, was about to unfold and we celebrate that next Sunday, Pentecost.

In these days, in public life, we see our Government realising, old ideologies have to give way to practical realities: one of those is the need to care properly for our “elderlies”. The “Hour Has Come” is a very short phrase but one that the present Pandemic pressures us to consider and act upon. We cannot continue as if we human beings are in charge: yes, we play our part, but we have the opportunity now to set new priorities, and that begins for us Christians with being in touch with the one who has set us into this time, this environment, this set of opportunities.

I was reading a Homily by Father Joseph Pollard for this Sunday. He writes: “We live in our hour of history by divine appointment. We will not be located here again, or walk this way again. We cannot erase the people given by God to our time and place, to our care, concern and ministry in our hour. Their names are written alongside ours for good or ill in the book of life or the book of loss. This is it for you and for me! Now is our hour in ministry. Let us fill it with light and love, so that our hour for glory can do nothing else, but infallibly follow it.”

In conclusion, I return to Psalm 26

*“The Lord is my light and my help;  
Whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
Before whom shall I shrink?”*

We reach out and touch his presence in prayer; we are not alone.

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