



26th Week in Ordinary Time and World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees:
25/26 September 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Together we make a difference”

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for this Sunday’s World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees is “Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees.” Just hearing those words, we are brought up straight! So much of the conversation, the talk, in media and politics is about the danger of being overwhelmed by Migrants and Refugees rather than the implications of this theme, which is about welcoming them to work with us for a better future, a richer society.

Being a Catholic Christian today, is not comfortable! We seem to be continually challenged by Pope Francis to take an uncomfortable path, like the man in this Sunday’s Gospel “who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day”, we prefer an easier, a more comfortable way to Heaven.

In a message for this day Bishop McAleenan, our lead Bishop for Migrants and Refugees, writes: “In our parishes and in our neighbourhoods, we can see that migration is a reality. There are many people from other countries. Pope Francis appeals to us to adopt an attitude of welcome to those who live among us, reminding us that they can revitalise our communities and enliven celebrations in our parishes. Their presence is a witness to the Catholicity of God’s people. Without undermining or devaluing our own culture and values, we are asked to be open to the treasure and the variety of gifts that migrants and refugees bring to our communities.”

Fortunately, in my pastoral area of responsibility for co-ordinating Ethnic Chaplaincies, I come into regular contact with many migrant and refugee communities: this means I am aware of the issues they face in life here, the opportunities they have to prosper, and the rich culture and experience they can offer us. One of the most dramatic changes I have witnessed in the last 20 years or more is the way in which England has embraced the cuisine of other nations: we started with Chinese, then began eating Italian, on to India/Pakistan Curries, and now Turkish. All of this can be seen in the variety of Restaurants and cook shows on TV.

From the Church perspective we are seeing more nations represented in our Parishes and different languages and Liturgies being introduced through Chaplaincies, Eparchies and Missions. The Intercultural Masses, started way back in the 1970s to mark “One World Week”, continue to celebrate our Church of many nations. More recently we have Eastern Rites, such as Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara, being celebrated in our Parishes.

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And, with the sadness of war in Ukraine, we are more conscious of the presence of Ukrainian Refugees, beginning after World War II, and bringing their own Byzantine Rite. At the same time, we are seeing the number of Priests and Religious coming from abroad not only supplementing our declining numbers but also caring for their own people, and contributing in no small way to the life of all local communities. You only need to go to seek healthcare or care for the elderly to know how the whole country depends on migrants and refugees to run our most important services.

It is sad to see in the midst of this that there is so much racism evident for example in sport where we have so many fine athletes and players enhancing our pleasure and competence on the world stage.

In his message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees Pope Francis writes: “The presence of migrants and refugees represents a great challenge, but at the same time an immense opportunity for the cultural and spiritual growth of everyone. Thanks to them, we have the chance to know better our world and its beautiful diversity.”

The Pope’s intention for October: “We pray for the Church; ever faithful to, and courageous in preaching the Gospel, may the Church be a community of solidarity, fraternity and welcome.”

We have these wonderful challenging words in St. Paul’s letter to Timothy in the second reading for the 26th Sunday: “Fight the good fight of the Faith and win for yourself eternal life to which you are called.” Pope Francis says: “The ultimate meaning of our `journey´ in this world is the search for our true homeland, the Kingdom of God, inaugurated by Jesus Christ, which will find its full realisation when he comes in glory.”

Signing the Book of Condolence at the Funeral of Queen Elizabeth II, President Biden said “The world is better for her ... she gave us the notion of service ... we can all do something.”

“Together we can make a difference”, building a better world says Bishop McAleenan. It has been said: “It is a moment as a nation to think of who we are, and who we want to be.” This is our moment as a Church too.

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