



22nd Week of the Year – 1 September 2024
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Your words are spirit Lord, and they are life”
(Alleluia verse 22nd Sunday)

This week I was especially interested to hear the discussion on Times Radio on Monday morning 26 August: it was about “Cultural Christianity”, and the author of a piece in the Church Times was being interviewed. Madeleine Davies had done research into how much Christianity impacts on life in England today. The sense I get from the outcome of her research was not surprising: people are drifting further from the Church in terms of commitment and practice, though a large number would subscribe to the general life principles of Christianity in terms of love and care for neighbour; and indeed many would enjoy religious music and art; many too would subscribe to Christian principles in politics and public life, and in commerce as well.

When I think back to my time as Parish Priest one of my concerns was the weakness in depth of practice of the Faith with regard of Sunday Mass attendance by parents: this resulted in children not growing up with that as part of their way of life, a truly ‘Catholic Culture’. It is not long then before ‘Cultural Christianity’ is all that is left: good as this is, a lot has been lost especially with regard to the person of Jesus and His teaching as passed on in the Church. Speaking with priest friends on Tuesday this week (27 August), I was pleased to hear from one, who is from Boston in the States, about “Gospel Weeklies” a Family orientated Faith Formation Programme connecting to the Sunday Gospel. A number of priests coming from Hong Kong and celebrating Mass in Cantonese have asked about Catechesis for young people i.e. Sunday School. The Gospel Weeklies Programme which the American priest has in his Parish fortnightly after Mass on Sundays involves parents. He said many of them (the parents) find it enriching, answering questions they had never answered and leading to a deeper appreciation of the riches of the Catholic Faith. I look forward to sharing this Programme with the Priests and Catechists of our Deanery. I am hoping of course that this can lead to a deeper commitment in families to the “awe and wonder” of all the Church has to offer.

The centrality of the Eucharist in deepening our relationship with Jesus and the Church is at the heart of our preparation for the Jubilee Year 2025. Archbishop Reno Fisichella pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation at the Vatican and organiser of the Jubilee Year, has compared it to the Olympics in terms of the immense work underway to prepare for it. Using it as an analogy he said, speaking in Rimini at a Conference ‘Friendship among Peoples’, that the desire that dwells in his heart is that the Church,

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Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



through the Jubilee, *“may become even more convinced of the beauty and responsibility of bringing the Gospel to everyone. Because the Jubilee is a unique expression of evangelisation.”* He spoke of Hope (the theme of the Jubilee) involving *“a personal journey for the whole Church, for humanity, which is why we are all pilgrims. Especially in a time like this, with so much violence.”*

At this time we are preparing in prayer for the great Jubilee 2025, which begins in Advent of this year. Fisichella calls the Jubilee a *“path of hope in troubled times”*. On Sunday 15 September every parish and member of an ethnic chaplaincy will be reflecting on this in a period of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. In this context I noted the words of Pope Francis in a message sent to the Eucharistic Congress taking place 23-26 August in the African inland nation of Madagascar. He said: Approaching Christ in the Eucharist *“contributes to the growth of each one of you as Christians, as you are called to become more and more....Once we have encountered Christ in adoration once you have touched and received Him in the Eucharistic celebration”*, Pope Francis marvelled, *“it is no longer possible to keep Him to ourselves; instead we become missionaries of His love to others.”* *“The Eucharist”* he said, *“compels us to a deeply committed love for our neighbour because we cannot truly understand and live its meaning if our heart remains closed to our brothers and sisters.”*

As I read the Gospel for the 22nd Sunday of the Year my eyes fall on the words of Jesus: *“Listen to me, all of you, and understand....it is from within, from men’s hearts, that evil intentions emerge.”* Jesus warns us against externals: *“This people honours me only with lip-service while their hearts are far from me.”*

The Jubilee Year is an invitation to Hope and to Forgiveness: it is a time when the Church invites to go forward in Hope. Archbishop Fisichella said *“Hope is essential to Christian life because, together with Faith and Charity, it represents the believer’s way of life.”* At the same time, we can put the past behind us because at this time, especially, the Church opens the Door of Forgiveness to us; that is the meaning of “Indulgence”. Fisichella says *“The message is that God comes to meet you.”* Here we have much to ponder on as we gather for Adoration on 15 September: *“Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life.”*

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