



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

Office for Ethnic Chaplaincies and Eastern Catholic Churches
Co-ordinator: Monsignor Daniel McHugh

The Encouragement of Youth

Reflection for the 11th Week of the Year

14 June 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” (Mt 9:11)

This week we have the opportunity to follow the Apostolic Journey of Pope Leo to Spain which is being widely reported on the media – both radio and TV and the social media. There is so much to note in terms of sight, sound and word! I think the first and perhaps most encouraging sight was Pope Leo’s evening with young people: 600,000 came to meet him on the eve of Corpus Christi, to pray and adore the Blessed Sacrament. The question posed by the media before was, would the Pope attract more young people than Bad Bunny (a Puerto Rican Rapper) who was playing in Madrid at the same time. Bad Bunny had a good number 60,000, but Pope Leo had



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600,000! Like me, you will be encouraged by the response of young people to the call to listen to Pope Leo and spend time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. The coverage on the media was lengthy and respectful. I found myself asking “What is happening here?” Are young people dissatisfied with the materialistic and self-centred world we live in? Are they discovering that there is something more to put their hopes in – something Pope Leo articulates so well. One post read “tell me if it is not about the transparent tenderness of God, the heart of Jesus Christ, and a miraculous ability that make him [the Pope] at this moment in history, the father of humanity.”

A friend sent this response to me: “modernity and mass immigration has created an identity crisis... young people searching for identity find the Church because the Church has been midwife of European identity, has shaped and formed it.”

Another amazing scene in Madrid was the Pope addressing the Parliament. He did not mince his words on matters that are controversial in contemporary legislation. One website records “ In his historic address to the members of the Spanish Parliament, Pope Leo clearly denounces the crime of abortion and euthanasia, emphasising that “the defence of human life is not a partial issue, not a confessional interest: it is a goal of civilization.” The post continues, “Later on, he acknowledged the greatness of the Spanish people by stating that ‘Spain has known how to look upon the



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human being as something more than a piece of the social, economic, or political order.’ Pope Leo went on to point to the School of Salamanca (the Catholic University where some of our priests have studied) was precisely the one that laid the foundation for what the West now recognises as ‘Human Rights’! He continued “they (the lecturers and masters there) introduced into historical discernment the question of the irreducible value of every human being and the moral limits of power.” He concluded: “Beloved Spain, evangelizer of half the globe, reclaim your faith, your memory, your greatness! Long live Spain, the Catholic!” Pope Leo received a 7-minute ovation. (Catholic Saturday)

Today, Wednesday 10 June, Pope Leo is in Barcelona, and is blessing the newly completed Tower of Jesus Christ of the Sagrada Familia Basilica. It would have been the 100th Birthday of Gaudi, the architect, whose vision of “Gospel Joy” underpinned this extraordinary building, which attracts some 5 million visitors each year. Yahoo News records that “Historian Monica Santin, who leads tours of the Basilica, said that in designing Sagrada Familia, Gaudi was essentially guided by two books: the Gospel and nature.”

The Gospel of St Matthew for the Mass of the 11th Sunday of the Year is about Jesus sharing his mission with his disciples. The emphasis shifts from the Ministry of Jesus to the work of the community he has inaugurated. More than any other Gospel Matthew’s Gospel elaborates on the work of the



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Church, which is to continue after Jesus death and resurrection. The Sunday Connection Commentary on the Gospel passage concludes, “As Jesus sent his disciples to continue his work and mission, so too the Church is sent by Jesus. The Church is his continuing presence on earth. Every member of the Church is sent by Jesus to contribute to this mission.”

To see young people committing to this mission of building the Kingdom is an encouragement to us all; to see parliamentarians become aware of their part and embrace it is an encouragement too; and to see a professional artist/architect realise his contribution to human flourishing and invite us to be part of it, opens up avenues to all of us in our particular calling. Whatever our situation in life we can help build a better world: that was the message of Pope Leo to prisoners in Brians Prison, Barcelona, this morning. He spoke of mercy, redemption, and hope. He reassured inmates that “life’s mistakes do not define a person’s identity” and that God will never cease his love for them. His words to detainees, are encouraging to us all: “the Lord offers opportunities for new beginnings”, Pope Leo said, “No situation could make God turn his gaze from us” – (Vatican News). He went on “when you are tempted to feel inferior and think it is not worth going on, lift up your eyes to the One who...never ceases to show his love and closeness”.

The Kingdom we witness to can be closer than we think: the priest who took shelter, in a time of persecution, in the home of St Alban, our protomartyr



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(Feastday Saturday 13 June) didn't realise his life led to the conversion of the soldier, Alban. In turn Alban refused to deny Faith in Christ and was martyred for it. The encounter with the risen Lord through the witness of the priest led to an entirely new vision of what truly leads to happiness.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”