



3rd Week of Lent and The Solemnity of the Annunciation 23 & 25 March 2025
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son”
(John 3:16)

This past week there has been rejoicing at the great numbers of adults making their way into the Catholic Church. The Rite of Election on Sunday last at St Chad’s Cathedral and other Cathedrals across the country marked a special step as candidates for Initiation at Easter were formally chosen and prayed over by the Bishop beginning a period of deeper preparation during Lent. Significantly, it was the Commemoration at Mass on Tuesday 18th March of St Cyril of Jerusalem, a Saint famous for his writings of instructions for those in the catechumenate (the community consisting of new entrants to the Church together with their sponsors and godparents). Though Cyril lived in the 300s and wrote at that time, his writings have come down to us today, and show his reflection on the Church teaching and the Scriptures and how these impact on our way of life as followers of Jesus. He was famous especially for his defence of the Divinity of Our Lord, who was more than a great teacher, being God Himself made man.

As we reflect on the Scriptures for the 3rd Sunday of Lent 23 March and the Solemnity of the Annunciation which follows on 25th we are conscious of God coming into our world to be with us. This is what Moses experiences in the famous passage in Exodus, where God speaks to him from the Burning Bush (the title we have given our weekly vlog leading us to Reflection, Prayer and Adoration). In this passage God wants to lead his people from slavery and oppression to “*a land flowing with milk and honey*”. On the Feast of the Annunciation we see this vision being fulfilled in the coming of Jesus to “*reign over the house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom there will be no end.*” (Gospel for the Annunciation Luke 1:33)

In this Kingdom those who are oppressed and suffering will not be forgotten: this is very much the focus of the reading from Exodus in relation to refugees which is taken up in the Psalm 103 (102) with its response “*The Lord is compassionate and gracious.*” A recent picture of the Holy Father on the Internet sitting in prayer before the Altar and the Crucifix brings this home to us in relation to the sick. In a message to those who are suffering he speaks of the trial that he is experiencing and gives thanks for the prayers of so many that are sustaining him. God is with him in his trial, as He is with all those who turn to Him.

At the same time as reflecting on God’s sacred presence with us in these 2 celebrations of the Holy Eucharist, for which we give thanks, there is also a challenge coming through strongly: the challenge to conversion and reform of our lives. Lent is an opportunity for

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growth: that is the story of the fig tree. My mind has returned to the spiritual year I spent in Grove Park, near Warwick before going to study in Rome. It was the home of the recusant family, the Dormer's whose remains are in the cemetery at St Charles Borromeo, Hampton-on-the-Hill. The old house had a wonderful garden and in one corner there was a fig tree. In the year we were working in the garden in the afternoons the fig tree came to life at this time of year, new fruit began to appear. I remember the 'Gardener' Mr Hiatt being happy and pointing it out to us. The fig tree was bearing beautiful fruit, becoming what it was called to be. Lent is the time when we have the opportunity for some pruning leading to new growth, to reform in our lives. Maybe, like me, you are a bit overwhelmed by the emphasis on the purely material and economic in "*making our nations great again*" that is dominating political discourse at the moment. In the discourse being promoted by the Church at this time of Lent, we have a very important balance to the dominant political focus that misses out on a lot that is important for human flourishing. Thank God we sometimes hear important concerns being raised in the midst of public discourse too: such have been the concerns raised recently about parenting, and in particular young males having good role models. I raised it yesterday at a school Mass on the Feast of St Joseph. I pointed to three dominant themes in his life: the love and care for his family, shown especially in his taking Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape the horror of King Herod's rule; his search with Mary for the young Jesus when he left the family for debate in the Temple; and his upbringing with Mary of Jesus in the Faith of the People of Israel: this was where Jesus grew in the love of God and Neighbour that was to give direction to his life, where he was formed as a whole person. May we, like the fig tree, bear fruit through reform and repentance in this Jubilee Year.

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