



3rd Week Ordinary Time: 23/24 January 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Look to the Lord and be radiant; let your faces not be abashed.”

This reflection comes in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and my mind goes back to Rome 1966 when the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, came to stay at the English College, on his way to meet with Pope St. Paul VI – the first formal meeting of the Archbishop of Canterbury with the Pope in 400 years. The Pope marked the occasion by giving the Archbishop the ring he had as Archbishop of Milan. I believe it is now kept at Lambeth Palace and his successors as Archbishop of Canterbury wears it on formal visits to Rome. It was an emotional moment for us at the College: I remember our gathering round him to clap and cheer in the Cortile (inner square) of the College and his throwing his Canterbury Cap into the air.

The visit, and the joint declaration signed at St. Paul’s Basilica, signalled a new relationship was beginning, one that has blossomed in so many ways since that time, particularly in our joint witness to Christ “the light of the world” as Jesus says of Himself in one of the Communion Antiphons for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time.

The theme for this year’s Week of Prayer which will be highlighted in Unity Services especially on Sunday 23rd January is “We saw his star in the East and have come to worship Him” – The words of the Magi as they came to Bethlehem. The Unity Service is prepared this year by the Middle East Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches introducing the theme stressed: “Never before, as in these difficult times, do we feel the need for a light that overcomes the darkness, and that light, Christians proclaim, has been revealed in Jesus Christ.”

Pope Francis reminded us of the Week of Prayer in his angelus Message on Sunday 16 January, saying: “This year’s proposal mirrors the experience of the Magi who came from the East to Bethlehem to honour the messianic King ... We Christians, in the diversity of our confessions and traditions, are also pilgrims on the way to full unity, and we will draw near to our goal to the extent that we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, our only Lord.”

I thought of his wonderful reflection on the Solemnity of the Epiphany where he quoted Emeritus Pope Benedict in response to the question why the Magi had set out on their journey. “They had many reasons not to depart: wise men and astrologers; having attained sufficient cultural, social and economic security ... their eyes were not fixed here below; they were windows open to the heavens.” Benedict XVI said they were “men

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with a restless heart ... they were filled with expectation ... they were seekers after God." In answer to where this originated, this restlessness that had them to set out on this journey, Francis says: "It was born of desire ... it drives us to look beyond what is immediate and visible ... life is not first here and now, but something much greater."

The picture we have before us in the Gospel of St. Luke for the 3rd Sunday of the Year, is Jesus returning to his home town, Nazareth, where he was brought up, and speaking in the Synagogue of His Mission after His Baptism. It is the favourite vision of the Prophet Isaiah.

In the power of the Spirit Jesus saw Himself bringing it to fulfilment in His Ministry: making things better for the poor, setting prisoners free, restoring sight to the blind, proclaiming a year of favour from the Lord. There is a danger we may feel despondent about Christian unity, but when we see St. Paul in the reading from 1 Corinthians, spell out how in the power of the Spirit we can play our part we can play our part in the Body of Christ, using the talents we have been given to build the Kingdom of God in the world today, the desire of the Magi can be rekindled in us.

In his Epiphany Homily Pope Francis said the Magi "were not content to plod through life but yearned for new and greater horizons."

The one they found is the one who offers us new life: working in the Church and with our fellow Christians, in the power of the Holy Spirit, let us take His light to the world. Let this be our desire as we meditate on the words of the Communion Antiphon for the Third Sunday: "Look to the Lord and be radiant; let your faces not be abashed." (Psalm 33) I like these words of Emeritus Pope Benedict: "One who has hope lives differently." The steps taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope Paul VI in 1966 have borne much fruit: let us continue in that way.

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