



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

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

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# *Look to the Future with Hope*

*- Pope Leo in Angola -*

Reflection for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
26 April 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“The Sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.” (John 10:4)**

The Apostolic Journey of Pope Leo to four countries in Africa (Algeria, Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea) has been a welcome “eye opener” on the strength of the Catholic Faith on that Continent. We are now aware, if we were not before, that 20% of the world’s 1.4 billion Catholics are there. Media coverage has been much more substantial than usual because of Pope Leo’s insistence on the importance of Christians working for Peace in a world at war: the difference with the Government in his homeland – the USA – has led to debate on matters that would never normally be covered in the media like “just war theory”. I found myself googling it on the internet so



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that I could recommend a source for those who might be interested in looking it up. I found the key principles there and now they are rooted in Christian philosophy (going back to the times of St Augustine) that aims to ensure going to war is morally justifiable. These include:

- That there be a just cause: meaning it should be defending against attack, protecting innocent life, or correcting a grave injustice.
- That there be a right intention: the goal must be to secure peace and justice, and not to gain wealth and power.
- That it is a last resort: all other peaceful options must be exhausted.

The Theory goes on to address conduct in war, and justice after war. The Theory has developed over centuries from ancient Greek and Roman thought to Christian Theology. As you would expect the Catechism of the Catholic Church has a section devoted to “avoiding war” in a chapter on *Safeguarding Peace* which is dealt with in part III on Life in Christ. There we read “The fifth commandment forbids the intentional destruction of human life. Because of the evils and injustices that accompany all war, the Church insistently urges everyone to prayer and to action so that the Divine Goodness may free us from the ancient bondage of war.” (no. 2307) In no.



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2308, the Catechism continues: All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war. However, ‘as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defence, once all peace efforts have failed.’”

We detect a clear reluctance on the part of the Church to support the option of war: this was the situation of Pope Leo during his Apostolic Journey to Africa; the option of extending the war in Iran was being debated, and the countries he was visiting had experience of war too. The Pope was advocating for the option of Peace. As I write the Reflection the Pope’s Apostolic Journey is nearing its end: last week I was reflecting on his visit to Algeria and Cameroon. At the weekend he was in Angola; Gerard O’Connell was covering the visit there for America Magazine. He wrote on Sunday Last: “On his second day in Angola, (April 19<sup>th</sup>) Pope Leo celebrated Mass for 100,000 people at Kilamba, a satellite city built by the Chinese, 18 miles south of Luanda, the capital city of this predominantly Christian country. He spoke about the need for reconciliation and for healing of the wounds still open after a civil war that stretched, for more than 20 years. He called on the people “to build a country where old divisions are overcome forever, where hatred and violence disappear, where the scourge of corruption is healed by a new culture of justice and sharing.” He told them,



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“Only in this way will a future of hope be possible, especially for the many young people who have lost it.”

O’Connell continued, describing the excitement as Pope Leo drove in the popemobile among the vast crowd... there was lively music, song and dance. Then O’Connell took the opportunity to speak to some young people about the Pope’s visit, and he recalls:

- Arlingo, 25, [who] said he felt “joy at receiving the head of the Catholic Church” and hoped the Pope would “bless this land which has many problems, social and economic.”
- Dima, a Catechist from the province of Hulle, which is a 20-hour car ride from Luanda, told him “the visit is a blessing for Angola, that the successor of Peter visits this land.” He hopes the Pope will bring “social-peace among peoples.”
- Maria-Sok, a construction engineer, said, “the Pope’s visit is a blessing for our country and our people. I hope he brings peace and solidarity.”

O’Connell goes on to say “their expectations are consistent with the motto for Leo’s visit here, which is, “Pilgrim of Hope, Peace and Reconciliation.”



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Observing the enthusiasm and joy of the Faithful, who turned out in vast numbers to greet Pope Leo in all 4 countries, against the backdrop of the Gospel for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, it has been evident that they see him as the “good shepherd” spoken of by Jesus in Chapter 10 of St John’s Gospel. Jesus is telling his listeners that these metaphors (the shepherd and the gate of the sheepfold) show that those who follow him will have abundant life. And the shepherds who are faithful to Him are the ones whom the sheep (Jesus’ disciples) should follow. Sunday Connection in its commentary says: “Today’s Gospel gives us the opportunity to reflect on Christian leadership. Jesus’ words suggest to us that those who will lead the Christian community will be known for their faithfulness to Jesus... Christian leaders follow the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, by being faithful to Him and by being a good shepherd.

We thank God for Pope Leo’s example of being a “good shepherd” who leads the flock to fertile pastures in a complex world. On this Vocations’ Sunday, when we pray for Priestly Vocations let us pray for our priests and future priests who will never lose sight of Christ Jesus our Lord, and guide the flock to Him “as we ourselves follow in faith the sound of his voice.” (cf Ernest Ferlita “The Paths of Life” page 84)

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