



22<sup>nd</sup> Week of the Year: Reflection on the Sunday Mass Scripture Readings, 29<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup>  
August 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life.”**

As I prepare this Reflection, I am in Walsingham, the National Shrine of Our Lady, for a few quiet days. Having been here on a number of occasions over the years, I notice something new: on entering the Slipper Chapel (the Catholic Shrine of Our Lady) I noted the change that has taken place in the Holy Ghost Chapel, these days more commonly called the Chapel of the Holy Spirit. There is a beautifully restored mosaic of the Day of Pentecost, the coming down of the Holy Spirit on Our Lady and the Apostles. As the original Shrine (destroyed in the Reformation) was the result of a vision granted to the Lady Richeldis in 1061 in which she was asked to build a replica of the Holy House of Nazareth, the focus is on the Annunciation of Our Lady: her being greeted by the Angel “Mary do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour. Listen; you are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.” Mary asks how this is to come about as she is a virgin. The Angel Gabriel answers: “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow.” Mary’s response is: “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me.” Our prayer turns to the wonder of the Incarnation, the “yes” of Mary to God’s will, and the coming of Jesus the Son of God among us, through the power of the Spirit. Though she wondered, we are told in Scripture she “pondered all these things in her heart.” The story unfolds of course with Mary’s yes to Jesus’ Birth, his teaching and miracles, His redeeming death and Resurrection.

Then we come to the call of the Apostles who are chosen by Jesus to carry on His Mission “Go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news, and know that I am with you always to the end of time.” The small Chapel of the Holy Spirit was added to the Slipper Chapel later and it is here that we see the beautiful restored mosaic of the Holy Spirit coming down on Our Lady and the Apostles. From being a frightened group hiding in the Room for fear of the Jews after the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus, they were “filled with the Holy Spirit preaching ‘about the marvels of God.’” (Acts 2:11).

You consider then the great coming of the Spirit at the birth of the Church and His continuing presence with us. It is in this Chapel, I think, that we reflect on our life of witness to Jesus too, and day-by-day in the light of the Scriptures work out what that means for each one of us. Appropriately we see two Statues in the Holy Spirit Chapel, - one of St Thomas More, the other St John Fisher – either side of the mosaic as if to say our witness can even demand that we give all as the Lord gave all in love for us.

Interestingly, this past week, Pope Francis spoke of personal responsibility as the key to starting off in the Post-Pandemic World. Though COVID19 is still with us it is time to say that in the light of the wonder of the new vaccines we are entering a new era, a world in

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which after the disconnection caused by the Pandemic, each person is back at the centre. Pointing to the way in which so many stood up and reached out to others in the Pandemic, he calls on us to reach out too, each according to our own situation. “Starting again” he says (through the Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin) “requires everyone to take risks”. He is not speaking here of risking our health by not taking precautions advised in these days, but of courage to personal responsibility in the power of the Holy Spirit. From being a man of fear – a coward even – Peter “filled with the Holy Spirit learned to speak courageously about Jesus to his Contemporaries”.

We see in the Gospel this Sunday, the fact that Christians had to break out of the shackles of man-made-laws that restricted and confined their potential to reach out to others. We must live lives inspired i.e. truly open to the Spirit of God rather than confined by expectation laid upon us and constricting our response to the basic law of love, walking in the Spirit of Jesus.

The lesson Mary teaches us is to walk in God’s ways, with a heart open to His will. The Pope says “what is needed above all is someone who has the courage to say “I” with responsibility and not with selfishness, communicating with his or her own life that the day can begin with reliable hope.” It is the Holy Spirit that gives us that courage.

Jesus reminds us too in the Gospel of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday not to give too much credence to externals, following rules without thinking about the intentions behind them. Rather our actions should be an expression of the conversion of our heart to God and to God’s ways.

I conclude with this poem, a prayer of Father Michel Quoist:

*If the musical note said: “The note isn’t what makes the music,”  
there wouldn’t be any symphonies.  
If the word said: “it’s not the word that can make the page,”  
there wouldn’t be any more books.  
If the rock said: “A stone cannot make a wall,”  
there wouldn’t be any more houses.  
If the drop of water said: “A drop of water doesn’t make the river,”  
there wouldn’t be any ocean.  
If the grain of wheat said: “The grain of wheat can’t sow the field,”  
there wouldn’t be any harvest.  
If a person said: “One gesture of love cannot save humanity,”  
there would never be any justice, peace or dignity, or happiness in the world.  
Just as a symphony needs each note,  
a book needs every word,  
houses need every stone,  
the ocean needs each drop of water,  
and the harvest needs each grain of wheat,*

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*the whole of humanity needs you,  
here and now; you are unique and thus irreplaceable.*

Yes, we each have a part to play. The whole of humanity needs you here and now; you are unique and thus irreplaceable.

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