



5th Week in Ordinary Time 9 February 2025

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Do not be afraid” (Luke 5:10)

A while ago I was sitting in the café at my favourite Tesco. A large notice beside a picture of beautiful cakes with cream and jam said temptingly: “Cakes: oozingly filled with indulgence.” I thought “indulgence” isn’t always a bad word, though I suppose people are a little hesitant about using it, ever since it was said the Church sold “indulgences” at the time of the Reformation. Parents (and even more Grandparents) can be said to be a bit over indulgent with their children when they allow them to have too many cakes and chocolates. And, the Church in her love for her children can be said to be over indulgent too: in this case with forgiveness and remission of punishment due to sin. It is a word we hear a good deal in the context of the Jubilee Year. The Church does indeed encourage us by offering us a great gift (grace) of the “plenary indulgence”. This is described in *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, (The Doctrine of Indulgences) as a: “remission before God of the Temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain defined conditions through the Church’s help when, as a minister of redemption, she dispenses and applies with authority the Treasury of the Satisfactions won by Christ and the Saints.”

Just as parents who are indulgent with children require something in return the Church is indeed indulgent with us: she offers us the grace of remission of punishment due to sin, but there are conditions! We are required to work on our detachment from sin; make a Sacramental Confession within about 20 days; go to Holy Communion; and pray for the Holy Father’s intentions. Working on detachment from sin is surely the most demanding: I noted Pope Francis speaking at the 2nd Jubilee Audience on Saturday last was saying “*to hope is to turn around to God*” (detachment from sin). The Pope invites us to embrace conversion as a lifelong journey, highlighting the figure of Mary Magdalene, who in Jesus found a new direction and meaning in her life. Conversion, he explained (see Lisa Zengarini in Vatican News) as not a one-time event but an ongoing process in which we repeatedly turn away from old ways of thinking and embrace new possibilities. The Pope went on to say that hope emerges even in a world filled with suffering and wrongdoing when individuals recognise the presence of those who live differently – people whose humility and transformation captivate and inspire others.

We have a special more contemporary figure in this regard who is placed before us by the Church this week – St Josephine Bakhita – like Mary Magdalene, when she heard Jesus call her name at the time of his Resurrection, she no longer saw death and despair,

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but life and hope. St Josephine Bakhita's life is one of those stories that just remains with you. Born in Sudan in 1869, she died in Italy in 1947. She endured the unimaginable as a slave before finding freedom and discovering the love of Christ. Despite the horror she faced, Bakhita's life is a testament to the power of faith, resilience, and the transformational grace of God. In one evaluation of her life I read these words:

"Bakhita's life challenges the notion that we are merely products of our circumstances. Kidnapped, sold into slavery, and subjected to brutal treatment, she could have easily succumbed to despair. Yet Bakhita chose to trust in God and found freedom in Christ in the midst of her circumstances. Her life teaches us that true freedom is not about external conditions but about the inner choice to accept God's grace and trust his plan." We keep her Feast this Saturday 8 February: she is indeed inspirational in this Jubilee Year when we are encouraged by Pope Francis' words "To hope is to turn around to God."

In the Gospel for the Fifth Sunday Jesus says to Peter: *"Do not be afraid; from now you will be catching men."* Peter had a night of failure at fishing and he was reluctant to cast the nets once more, but Ferlita in his commentary says that Peter's *"fear"* which he hadn't voiced, but Jesus saw, was of *"letting Jesus into his life."* It is a very appropriate Gospel to reflect on in the month of February when the intention of the Holy Father's Worldwide Prayer Network remembered especially on the First Friday is *"for vocations to the priesthood and religious life."* The Pope says, *"let us pray that the ecclesial community may welcome the desires and doubts of those young people who feel a call to serve Christ's mission in the priesthood and religious life."* In this era when there is often a fear of commitment involved in marriage and even in Baptism, is it surprising that there can be fear about the vocation of priesthood and religious life among young people, and a reluctance in families to pray for and encourage such vocations?

The Jubilee Year and The Special Indulgence offered to us by the Church is a challenge to us individually to turn around to God; it is also a challenge to us as a community to turn around to God as we go forward as Pilgrims of Hope visiting places where we see and experience the presence of Christ and his Mother.

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