



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

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

Leaven for Growth of a Civilisation of Love

Reflection for the 15th Week of the Year

12 July 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons.” (Romans 8:23)

This past week we have been very conscious through the media of great celebrations of 250 years of Independence in the United States of America. The achievements of the US have been lauded across the



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country: its “Salute to America” event included carnival rides, live music, a huge firework display and a flypast as well as the President’s eagerly awaited address.

In his letter for the 250th Anniversary Pope Leo wrote “This semi-quincentennial marks that defining moment in the history of the United States of America, 4 July 1776, that gave enduring voice to the ideas of liberty, equality, the pursuit of happiness, justice and democratic self-government.”

The Pope continued: “For two and a half centuries, generations of Americans have worked together to carry these principles forward through sacrifice, service, innovation, and civic participation. This anniversary stands as an invitation not only to celebrate the nation’s remarkable journey, but also to reflect upon the responsibilities that the sons and daughters of this country bear to one another, and to the generations who will inherit the nation that is being shaped today.”



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Reflecting on the importance of religious freedom in the States, Pope Leo said “it is important to recognize that freedom of religion has long been central to the American promise, protecting both individual dignity and the peaceful co-existence of a diverse people. This same freedom has permitted the Catholic Church to take root and flourish within the United States, to the advantage not only of her own members, but of the entire nation. As faithful sons and daughters of the Church, Catholics are called to imbue every dimension of their existence with the Charity of Christ (cf 2 Cor 5:14), living out the Gospel in the circumstances of daily life. Such a way of living has given rise to the many benefits that the Church has provided over the years to the development of the nation. In particular I bring to mind her service in areas of education, the preferential care of the poor, healthcare and basic social services, to name a few.”

Pope Leo XIV then quoted the Encyclical *Sapientiae Christianae* by his predecessor Pope Leo XIII where he wrote “no better citizen is there ... than the Christian who is mindful of his duty” (no. 7). Pope Leo continued: “In fact - far from standing in opposition to the responsibilities of citizenship – it lends new vigour to the pursuit of



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justice, peace and the common good, bringing to perfection every natural gift bestowed by the creator.... In this regard, it is the faithful fulfilment of duty – to God and country – that Catholics are called to continue to serve the nation, as leaven for growth of a civilisation of love (cf Matthew 13:33)".

Pope Leo has frequently spoken of Christians as being "leaven". In Spain recently he encouraged "Christians everywhere to bring the leaven of selflessness to the world." (cf Vatican News 07/07/26). Recalling Jesus' parable of the yeast, he said the generosity of volunteers shows that Christians know how to leaven the dough of society with their care for others. He continued: "Selflessness is the leaven that makes the human, ethical and spiritual dimension of a society grow, and it is a distinctive element of the City of God".

The Parable in the reading from St Matthew's Gospel for the 15th Sunday of the Year is about the Kingdom of God and the need to prepare the ground of our lives to receive the seed of His Word so that His Kingdom flourishes in us. I enjoy, as some will know from



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Facebook, occasional walks around Earlswood lakes near to where I live. At the moment the grain is growing well and has a lovely yellow colour as harvest time draws near. Soon it will be cut and bailed. In time the ground will be ploughed and made ready for the seed to be sown that will give us the next crop to harvest this time next year.

To be leaven in the world, to build “the kingdom of God” we need to continually break up the ground of our daily life if you like and make it ready to receive the seed of God’s Word. The Bishops of the United States set out to prepare the Church Community earlier this year with the Consecration of the country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus so reminding Catholics of the one who is central to our lives and to the wellbeing of society. And, more recently they have had a Eucharistic Pilgrimage across the country finishing in Philadelphia on 5 July, so coinciding with the weekend celebration of 250 years of Independence. Pope Leo sent a special message marking the celebration: he said it was his hope that the Eucharistic Pilgrimage would help people raise their eyes to their heavenly homeland. He said the Eucharist is the indispensable gift that sustains the Church in its mission to society and its ongoing task of evangelisation. Then he entrusted the Nation to the Prayer of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.



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Listening to the words of St Paul in the reading from the letter to the Romans this coming weekend, we too are conscious of our need to embrace the Eucharist to sustain us on our journey.

“We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons.”

We ask the prayers of Mary to intercede for us that we too may be leaven to society and fertile ground for the seed of God’s Word.

- Consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus may we too be leaven for growth of a civilisation of love.