



Fourth Week of Lent (Year B): 14th / 15th March 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

Rejoice: “God sent His son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved”

This weekend our Archbishop, Bernard Longley, is sending us a Pastoral Letter: it will be read in all the Churches and Chapels of the Diocese, and I will read it at my weekly livestreamed Mass.

So this Reflection is for those who follow my weekly VLOG Burning Bush, a 10-minute pause for Prayer, Reflection and Personal Action. It will also be on the website of St Augustine, Solihull, my local parish, and on the website Our Lady of Good Counsel, Ethnic Chaplaincies, Eparchies and Missions. My current role is to co-ordinate support for Catholic Ethnic Communities on behalf of Archbishop Bernard.

These past weeks have been special for us because Pope Francis has made an Apostolic Visit to Iraq and one of our “Chaplaincies” is the St Joseph Chaldean Catholic Mission in the UK whose Chaplain is Father Andrew Toma, based in London, and our local Subdeacon is Dr Subhi Zora, who comes from Mosul. The Holy Father was in Mosul at the Church, destroyed by ISIS, where Subhi served Mass as a youngster years ago. You can imagine the Holy Father’s visit 5-8th March was very moving for the Chaldean Catholic Community based in the UK as they watched the visit unfold, and most moving of all of course for the Christians still left in Iraq.

I want to reflect briefly on the visit of Pope Francis in the light of the scripture readings for Laetare/Rejoice Sunday. In the Gospel, St John writes “God sent His son into the world, not to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved”.

The mission of Pope Francis was to take the Word of the Son of God to the people of Iraq: both to strengthen the Faith of the Christian people who have suffered so much, and to build bridges with the other Faiths and particularly the majority Muslim population.

In the Chaldean Church in Baghdad people said “he brought a message from God that we are not alone.” They dressed in their traditional costumes, made music, danced and sang. Despite the brutal fact that ISIS had driven so many of them from their homes and their Muslim neighbors had moved in, they believe a future is possible for Christians there. A young student, Richelle, originally from Qaraqosh, said she wept when she saw the Pope at the Church of the Immaculate Conception and she said “we believe he (the Pope) can help bring lasting peace to our country”.

It is evident from an “insider account” from a journalist travelling with the Pope (my friend of many years Gerard O’Connell in a Podcast for America Magazine) that the

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



people of Iraq are longing for peace, and all of them, of all Faiths look to the Pope's person and his words as Prophetic, a Man of God for all.

The second aspect I want to note from the visit of Pope Francis is his reaching out, especially to the Muslims. The meeting with Ayatollah Sistani was most significant for the future. We saw very little of it on TV here, so I was glad to hear it lasted longer than planned and was so fruitful. The Holy Father said of the Ayatollah "he is a missionary of light." Sistani spoke of the need for Christians to be treated with justice and fairness. The two leaders shaking hands at the end of the meeting was "the message" that led the Government of Iraq to declare a holiday on the 6th March every year.

But, the Holy Father, was also forthright in the Inter-religious prayer meeting in Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, where he took the message of "Fraternity" from his new Encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, that as people of Faith in one God, we must work together for peace, justice and reconciliation. He said we have to come together: "Peace means a future".

Gerard O'Connell was asked what impact the Apostolic Visit would have. He said "we are a Power of Prayer and Faith, and we are already seeing the fruit of it."

This week we rejoice because the light of Christ has come into the world as St John says in the Gospel. And we thank God for Pope Francis who has shone that light for us all to see in the land where our Faith has been lived and proclaimed from the very first Century of the Christian era.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese