



Solemnity of Christ the King – 34th Week of the Year: 22nd and 23rd November 2020
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“I am going to look after my flock myself and keep all of it in view.”

I must admit I have been struggling to find the right way to start this Reflection: I am happy to have the wonderful Solemnity of Christ the King to focus on, and at the same time I live in the shadow of yet more scandal in the Church that cannot be ignored. I have been fortunate to see the text of a Homily given by Father Lawrence Lew OP on the occasion of the memorial of Pope St Leo the Great, this past week, 10th November. He uses the comment made to him by someone who said “if I have a chance to speak with Leo the Great I would ask him what he said to Attila the Hun! How did he persuade him not to sack Rome and vandalize the Churches?”. That was in the year 452. Lew goes on: “However, today, it might appear as though the vandals have come inside the Church, for as we have known for some time now, much destruction has been done to innocent lives who had been entrusted to the Church and her Clergy and Leaders.”

This is his stepping stone to allude to the two reports that were published last week, one by the Vatican, the other from an Independent Enquiry in the U.K. highlighting mistakes made by Bishops and Popes in dealing with historical cases of clerical sex abuse in recent decades. He says “I wondered what St Leo the Great would have done? How would he fight off the Barbarians within?” Fr Lew points to the first reading off the Mass that day, from the letter of St Paul to Titus, who was sent to Christians in Crete to correct problems that arose there. Paul sends this message “give up everything that does not lead to God, and all our wordly ambitions; we must be self-restrained and live good and religious lives here in this present world”. And then Lew recalls the words of St Leo read every Christmas at the Office of Readings: “Christians, remember your dignity”.

He comments: “when we worry about the dignity of the institution of the Church, or of the organisation, or of our friends and the people we know, then we will have forgotten the fundamental dignity of the individual, the victim, the innocent, the child whose plight is bought before us. St Leo would have us remember the dignity of the individual first.” Fr Lew goes on to say: “To the victims, therefore, whose life has become a living hell, St Leo would thus proclaim that Our Lord Jesus Christ had descended into Hell; that he died, becoming the victim of all Man’s sins so as to rescue all victims of sin, and to raise them up to new life”. After this very relevant interpretation of Jesus’ “Descent into Hell” he concludes his remarks directly to the victims saying: “As the Holy Spirit continues to shine a light on the deeds of darkness that were done in God’s Church, I believe God is thus at work to purify and redeem His Church, and to bring healing and reconciliation and peace to victims. May God’s work be done and justice be upheld.”

To all of those who have sinned and made mistakes in this context, he applies the words of St Leo “Throw off your old nature and all its ways and, as we have come to birth in

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Christ.... remember your dignity and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition."

To those called to be servants of Christ, particularly priests and bishops and those in leadership positions Fr Lew says "Their reward is found in simply doing their duty, which is to serve faithfully and conscientiously and lovingly, upholding the dignity of the individual Christian, serving the good of the individual person....[who] is to be respected, cared for and listened to." Personally, I feel this is a call to structural change, and we have a way to go!

Finally, Fr Lew turns to those "confused and certainly dismayed and shaken by all of this". What would St Leo say to them? Fr Lew reminds us to place our hope in the Saviour who is the true Head of the Church and who on this Solemnity of Christ the King speaks to us in Ezekiel saying "I am going to look after my flock myself and keep all of it in view." Lew turns to the Collect of St Leo's Mass: "O God, who never allow the gates of hell to prevail against your Church, firmly founded on the Apostolic Rock, grant her, we pray, that through the intercession of Pope St Leo, we may stand firm in your truth and know the protection of your lasting peace."

Having listened to Andre Rieu playing "You Raise me Up" on his violin this morning, I would recommend you go there too. The words going with the wonderful music are:

*"You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains.
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas.
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders.
You raise me up to more than I can be."*

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Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese