



Second Week of Advent: 6th and 7th December 2020

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Open our Hearts in Welcome.”

There have been successive editions of The Roman Missal. In the one that came out in 1975 the opening prayer (the Collect) for the Second Sunday of Advent begins “God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome”. I chose those words to highlight the theme of my Reflection for this week. In the edition of the missal that was published in 2000 the opening prayer begins “may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son”. One compliments the other to my mind. Preparing for the celebration of the coming of our Savior at Christmas can so easily be derailed by the many activities that go with such a major Festival that is now as secular as much as a religious event.

As I entered into the celebration of Martyrs’ Day at my old College in Rome on Tuesday evening via a livestreamed Vespers I was taken back in spirit to the day 1 December in 1581 when the first of our Martyrs Ralph Sherwin was hung, drawn and quartered for his Catholic Faith at Tyburn. His last words were “Jesu, Jesu, Jesu Esto Michi Jesu”: “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus be to me a Jesus.” Jesus meaning Saviour. These words are now inscribed on a replica of the Gallows at Tyburn, London, in the Crypt of the Convent there. Bishop Nicholas Hudson, formerly Rector of the English College, in a Reflection for the “Beginning of Advent” written last Sunday says: “when I think of Advent starting, I think of Tyburn”. Thinking of those coming back from the College in Rome to the Mission in England he says: “They had come a thousand miles together, from Rome, to meet their end: here at Tyburn. This had been their Advent, their coming into their own. Because Advent means “coming”, they came that perilous journey in order that He might come, that He might come to the Catholics of England in Holy Communion denied them by Queen Elizabeth....”. He went on: “We reap the harvest of their love every time Jesus comes in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.... Yes, in Advent we prepare to welcome His coming into the world in Bethlehem. But, Tyburn recaptures for us the fullness of His coming: not just to be born among us, not just to live among us. No: He came to die with us; to offer His life for us.”

These profound words remind us of why the Church puts before us today the figure of St John the Baptist and his cry: “Prepare a way for the Lord”. We are now in the midst of preparing the celebrations: in the Parishes of the Deanery of East Birmingham and Solihull, each Parish Priest is considering how he is going to make it possible for people to get to Mass and Holy Communion as the numbers coming into Church is being constricted by the regulations on “distancing” brought in by the Pandemic. For each catholic it is a challenge too: on a Day when everyone goes to Mass and Holy Communion, even if they don’t go to Church regularly, what are they going to do to mark this most important of Festivals alongside Easter? I feel it is a time when each of us, lay, religious and cleric has to make a decision. How are we going to mark His coming? I

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think it needs to be more than watching a Mass on the internet or on TV though that could be part of it, of course.

In my Home I have the Advent Wreath and a red candle. I will have it lit each Sunday in a prominent place: the table where I celebrate a livestreamed Mass that people can join in via Facebook Live and YouTube. I have decided I will celebrate a special Christmas Mass online the Sunday after Christmas Day at 8 in the evening, the Feast of the Holy Family, so continuing the celebration of the Birth of Jesus for some of those who cannot get into Church for Mass on Christmas Day.

It is indeed a strange time in the Pandemic, but we cannot allow the Pandemic to derail our Christmas. One day our children will recall the way we marked this special Feast this year; it will remain alive in their hearts because we have not let it die in ours!

Our world needs people who hold steadfast to the Faith: a “Joy the world cannot give”, the “Pearl of great price”, the Martyrs gave all for.

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