



5<sup>th</sup> Week of Easter: 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“I am the vine and you are the branches” says the Lord**

We are very conscious as a Nation in these “difficult times” because of the Pandemic, of the need to look to the future, and to plan for it in the context of much uncertainty: its impact on jobs, on schooling, on finance, on health, and on society. The task facing Government is enormous. How has the Pandemic impacted on the Church, and how are we planning for the future?

A statement from the Bishops of England and Wales has been released in this past week from their Annual Post-Easter Conference (remotely I think). It is entitled “The Day of the Lord” after a Document some years ago “Dies Domini” of Pope St John Paul II. It is to be welcomed because we expect a lead to come from our Bishops. It is not a short document, running to 2 pages, and while it highlights some of the achievements of the Church Community during the past year, and more, in remaining “vibrant” communities evidenced by reaching out to the poorer in society, caring for the sick, remaining open for prayer (though in a more limited way) and continuing to worship together especially through use of the internet, it focusses for the future on Dies Domini, the Day of the Lord. They say “At this moment, then, we need to have in our sights the need to restore to its rightful centrality in our lives the Sunday Mass”. They go on: “We face the task of seeking to nurture the sense of Sunday as ‘a weekly gift of God to his people’, as something we cannot do without...to see the Sunday Eucharist as food for the unique mission with which we have been endowed...herein lies our treasure, enriching our relationship with Jesus and bringing together every aspect of our life and mission. This is such an important focus for our task in the coming months.”

The Bishops, it seems to me, have looked at the situation in the light of the limitations on practice in the Pandemic, and are anxious to see people return to full Sunday attendance again. Is there a danger that there will be a drop-off at regular Sunday Mass? The truth is we have seen a decline in practice in terms of the Sunday Mass for some years now, especially among younger families. It is best to acknowledge this, and to look together at how we can bring the younger generation especially, to a greater love of the Eucharist, and to see its centrality in our lives.

There is no better place to start than with the Gospel for the Mass of the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. It is taken from the discourse of Jesus at the last supper given to us in the Gospel according to St John Ch.15. It is one of my favorite passages in that Gospel, and I used to read a short section of it when I was taking Holy Communion to the sick. It begins: “I am the vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.... I am the vine and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him bears fruit in plenty... Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers.”

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

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From experience of many years now as a Priest, I have seen how non-attendance at Sunday Mass has led to the Faith being lost or severely impaired in families. I am not saying they are bad people, of course not, our schools and our families have continued to witness to the way of Jesus, and the Churches are there for all those who return whether it is for Baptism or for their Funeral. But, the vitality of the Faith depends on the Eucharist. Pope Francis at one of his weekly addresses reflected on this Passage from the Last Supper saying: “when Christ knows that death is drawing near he seeks to impress firmly on their minds a fundamental truth: even when He will no longer be physically present in the midst of them, they will still be able to remain united to Him in a new way, and to bear much fruit.” “If on the contrary” He says, “one should lose communion with Him we would become sterile...the fruits of profound union with Christ are wonderful...Our whole person is transformed... we receive a new way of being, the life of Christ becomes our own: we are able to think like Him, to act like Him, to see the world and the things in it with the eyes of Jesus.” That is what the Sunday Mass offers us.

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