



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

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

“This Shall Never Happen to You”

Reflection for the 22nd Week of the Year

30 August 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“By testing you may discern what is the will of God.” (Romans 12:2)

This past weekend Pope Leo celebrated Mass at the Port of Rimini, a well know seaside resort in North East Italy. Present was “one of the Church’s most extraordinary living witnesses: 97-year-old Cardinal Ernest Simoni of Albania” (cf EWTN Vatican). I was reminded of a visit I made to Albania for just 3 days when I was a Deacon in June 1967. I went there with a fellow Deacon from the English College in Rome. We travelled from Dubrovnik in Croatia as it was the only – and very restricted – way into Albania at the time. We were conscious that the Church and indeed any religious organisation was not free to express Faith by the atheistic regime. I remember our reading the Prayer of the Church together where



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

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

we were staying and praying that freedom would come one day. All churches and other places of religious worship had been closed under Enver Hoxha. We noticed the poverty in places like Shkoder: where women were sweeping the streets with rush brooms. Little did we know that in that same town and at that time Cardinal Simoni who had been sentenced to death for his fidelity to Christ on Christmas Day 1963 was in prison while we were free; the sentence was later commuted and he ended up cleaning sewers in Shkoder until his release in 1990. This year he celebrates 70 years of priesthood!

I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to meet others too in Eastern Europe who have carried that Cross after Our Lord rather than deny Him by taking an easier way. One I met while promoting Maryvale courses in Lithuania was Archbishop Tamkevicius of Kaunas, later a Cardinal too, who survived years in the “underground” Church. A special blessing in the light of current political development was encountering the Ukrainian Catholic Church members in Lviv and Kyiv after the demise of the Soviet Union in the mid 1990s. So many gave so much to keep our Faith in the way of our Lord; and at Maryvale Institute through distance learning we were able to assist training of their Catechists.

The Way of the Lord is not always an easy way, but it is the way of truth, a way that leads to the joy of the life. That is the central message of the



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

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

Gospel for the 22nd Sunday of the year. We cannot deny the reality of the Cross, it is part of everyone's life.

Peter, who was Christened the Rock on which the Church would be built by Our Lord in last week's reading is told that his vision of the triumphant Messiah is not the way to life, rather it is the way of the 'servant king'.

Coming to terms with our desire for human success, position and material things, and the way set out for us by Jesus is an ongoing struggle for each of us: that is the context of the reading from St Paul to the Romans in the Mass for the 22nd Sunday. Paul writes "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

I was sad to hear on Radio 4's News Programme this morning (Wednesday 26 August) of the death of a young woman; her father was being interviewed about her suicide which came about because of accusation at work about her sharing restricted information, which she denied. She couldn't cope with the pain of it all: without going into this in detail, we are not surprised to hear of suicide today; sadly we're aware it can even be encouraged! Once we take the gift of life from God, deny its origin, it will begin to lose its base – the fact that it is not ours to dispose of.



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

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

Suffering and pain seen in the light of the Cross becomes through prayers and discernment the way to a higher life.

Most years I am part of a Pilgrimage group to places of special significance for our Catholic Faith. This year, to mark the Feast of the Exaltation/Triumph of the Cross we are going to Lucca, N. W. Italy, for 13/14 September. There the Community treasures and venerates the Volto Santo (the Holy Face), a Crucifix from the 8th Century where the face of Jesus is said to really look like his – a story that has been passed down through the centuries. The Crucifix is revered in a special ‘Tempietto’ in the Cathedral, San Martino, and a painted replica is carried through the streets the eve of the Feast. On the Day 14 September there is a special Solemn Mass which our Pilgrims will be part of. It is an opportunity for us to reflect on the choice of Jesus to take the way of service in truth rather than escape what it could mean for us. We will revere the Cross as we do so often in our prayers here at home, and embrace the sacrificial love of Jesus in discerning our way in life.

“By testing you may discern what is the will of God.”