



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

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

A City Set on a Hill Cannot be Hidden

Reflection for the 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
8 February 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Whoever follows me will have the light of life.” (John 8: 12)

Recently I reflected on “Ordinary Time” in the Church Year as a time when we seek to live the life of Christ taught in the Scripture and inspired by this “Season of the Saints”. As I look ahead, this Wednesday morning (4 February) to the coming week I see so many matters flagged up for us in the Church Ordo with intentions for prayer in the celebration of Mass: these, especially, lead us to think about the “light of life” given to us by Jesus and brought to our attention by the Church. When you think that the Holy Father’s Prayer Intention for February is: “For Children with incurable diseases”; “that children suffering from incurable diseases



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and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.”

We are reminded as we go about our daily lives and preoccupied with our own concerns that there are parents and carers out there who are struggling to get through each day taking care of sick children. We can remember them and the children in our prayer, and, if we are in a position to influence public health policy, through our political representation, that should be a priority during this month. Sometimes we can join with others to assist Charities dedicated to this cause.

On the 5th Sunday of the Year, 8 February, we have noted in the Ordo that it is the Day for Victims of Human Trafficking. In years past we may not have been so aware of this being so much of an issue in our time but with the number of people being exploited because of their hope to get away from poverty and oppression to find a better life for themselves and their families, it has become a subject of daily conversation due to immigration being such a hot political topic. And even more recently we have become aware of human trafficking in the area of young women and girls being brought to this country for the satisfaction of male predators. The Church considers human trafficking a crime and a violation of human dignity, with Pope Francis labelling modern slavery a priority issue for the Church. The Pope has declared trafficking, forced labour and prostitution as crimes against Humanity, and Church Doctrine highlights that traffickers often target the most vulnerable, including women, children and migrants. The Church doesn't just highlight for prayer issues around modern slavery and instruct us about its prevalence in so many different areas, it also takes action: it is active through the



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Santa Martha Group – a global partnership between Catholic leaders and police chiefs aimed at eradicating human trafficking. Tens of thousands of religious sisters in 92 countries are actively engaged in frontline efforts to combat it. And, the Vatican's Migrants and Refugees Section has produced a document "Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking" offering a framework for dioceses, priests and schools to respond to trafficking. If you google this matter you will see the focus of the Church on root issues such as: Labour Exploitation; Consumer Responsibilities; and Opportunities to Aid Survivors, and address root causes through advocacy and support programmes.

We are very aware of the famous passages in Matthew 25 (31 – 45) where Jesus spells out what loving God and our neighbour means in relation to the Last Judgement. Jesus says in verse 25 "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me."

The Social Teaching of the Church is an application of these words of Our Lord to the times in which people live. The "Light of life" which Jesus brings - spoken of in the Gospel for the 5th Sunday – guides the steps of the Church in her teaching. Another Day of Prayer in the coming week is for the Sick; it has been placed on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, 11 February, the day on which Mary first appeared to St Bernadette in 1858. We are all aware of this Shrine: millions visit annually to pray, seek healing, and bathe in the spring water. The Pilgrimage to Lourdes is a highlight of the Diocesan Calendar and many sick people are taken there in hope of healing. The lighting of candles in memory of loved ones, the torchlight Procession, with the Blessing of the Blessed Sacrament are key moments. Many



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young people and nurses volunteer to go to assist the sick, especially when going to bathe in the healing waters at the grotto. I was reminded by a headteacher of his experience of the power of this time of prayer to change young peoples' lives, and not only young people – adults too. Gathering together in praise and thanksgiving, particularly before the Blessed Sacrament and accompanied by Mary, Mother of Jesus, so often strengthens and generates Faith. This experience of being together in praise has a profound impact on our Faith and the Faith of young people especially, as Pope Leo has noted recently. Helping the sick appeals to all of us, too.

The last Day of Prayer this coming week is for Europe on Saturday 14th February. We are very conscious of the important part Catholicism has played in its history, and the conflicts that have shaped its story. Currently the war in Ukraine dominates. The Feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius on 14 February struggles to get traction given the long history of St Valentine! Whether we agree with Pope St John Paul's decision on the date or not, it does highlight the unique part Christianity has played in Europe, and the importance of prayer for peace and for Church leadership in its future direction:

“A city set on a hill cannot be hidden” says Jesus in the 5th Sunday Gospel; that is the role of the Church in Europe in these times!

There is our challenge, Sts Cyril and Methodius pray for us, Amen.