



Choosing the Right Way

Reflection for the 23rd Sunday of the Year and the Birthday of Our Lady 7-8 September

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Who has traced out what is in the heavens?” (Wisdom 9:16)

Many years ago on holiday in France with Priest friends I found myself in Alsace in the East of France, bordering Germany. I was happy to have the opportunity to return recently and to explore the region more, and especially to visit some of the Romanesque Churches that are to be seen there. In the Church of St Martin in Colmar, a beautiful town not far from Strasbourg (the home of the European Parliament) I found a beautiful Triptych of the life of St Anne, a carving focussing on the Nativity of Our Lady a memorial which is celebrated on 8 September all over the world. It was the first time I had seen such a depiction and I noticed in Churches across the area posters advertising the upcoming celebration of the Birth of Our Lady. As you might expect, I have placed a picture I took of the Triptych on the Burning Bush Vlog which is being prepared for this weekend's 10 minutes of prayer and reflection focussing on the scriptures and current issues demanding our attention.

At the moment of course it is the time of the year when young families are thinking of sending children to school for the first time, or changing to secondary school, colleges and university. When I was a Parish Priest, and still today, I hear parents say: “Whatever you want to achieve, you can do it!” It is well intentioned of course, and encouraging, but I wonder sometimes how balanced it is! My prayer for children and young people is that they fulfil the talents they have been given to the best of their ability! Sometimes, that will mean not going to University but learning skills that will head them in the direction of a trade or service of some kind. I am sure the prayer of many Catholic mothers is that their children find happiness, and a direction in life that in one way or another fulfils the plan God has for them. That is what Monday's Feast leads us to think and pray about. Liturgists point out that the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is, like almost all of the principal solemnities of Our Lady such as Christmas, of Eastern origin. In the Latin Church it was introduced by Pope Sergius, an Eastern Pope at the end of the 7th Century. Originally it was the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St Anne in Jerusalem. Tradition indicates this was

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



in the place of the humble home of Saints Joachim and Anne, descendants of King David and parents of Mary, Mother of Jesus. We find in this Feast a profound truth: the coming of the God-Man on earth was long planned by the Father over the course of the centuries. The divine person of the Saviour is infinitely more than humanity itself could generate, but the story of humanity portrayed in Scripture reveals the slow and difficult growth of the conditions necessary for the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The Franciscan Media post for this Feast reads, Saint Augustine connects Mary's birth with Jesus saving work. He (Augustine) tells the earth to rejoice and shine forth in the light of her birth. Quoting Augustine: "She is the flower of the field from whom bloomed the precious lily of the valley. Through her birth the nature inherited from our first parents is changed." The opening prayer of the Mass speaks of the birth of Mary's Son as the dawn of our Salvation.

The Gospel for the 23rd Sunday is taken from St Matthew Chapter 14 and Jesus focusses on the difficulties of following him. He speaks to the crowd of discipleship and explains that, when it comes to the Kingdom of God, nothing can get in the way. The Loyola Press commentary explains: "when Jesus describes "hating" one's father and mother he is not talking about feelings. Rather, he is emphasising very strongly that choosing to be a disciple means that everything else – family, money, your own life – must come second. It means to bear one's own cross. These difficult sayings of Jesus are followed by two brief parables in this chapter (a person constructing a tower, and a king marching into battle) that make the point – don't start what you cannot finish. Discipleship is something we can only commit to if we are prepared to put the Kingdom of God before everything else. The Church continually reminds us of the example of Mary the Mother of Jesus, on our journey of Faith, following Him. The trust she showed at the Annunciation "Be it done unto me according to thy word" – took her to stand with her Son at the crucifixion, and to rise with Him at the Assumption. That is the Hope we live by as Christians and parents seek to pass on to their children. Those wonderful words in the Book of Wisdom for the 23rd Sunday "*Who has traced what is in the heaven*" point to our lack of knowledge of God's plans for each of us, but the passage concludes: "*the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom.*"

We ask Mary's prayers that we may follow her wise words: "Do what he tells you".

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese
