



Fifth Week in Ordinary Time: 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“I should be punished if I did not preach the Gospel”**

Those that know me will not be surprised that I went to Damascus in Syria to mark the Year of St Paul which was celebrated by the Church 2008-2009. I made my way to Straight Street and the chapel called after St Ananias to whom Paul went after his extraordinary conversion, which we celebrated on his Feast Day just two weeks ago, 25<sup>th</sup> January. Paul, from being a persecutor of Christians, became the man who preached Christ across the land that is now called Turkey, and onto Greece, and eventually Rome where he was martyred. Later, when I visited Turkey, and Greece on holiday I made a point of visiting places where Paul had preached the Gospel, such as Ephesus and Athens. In the second reading of the Mass for the Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time Paul says “I do not boast of preaching the Gospel, since it is a duty which has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it”.

Paul knew more than anyone that his conversion came about because of the Grace of God. He had been marked out for a special purpose, and how faithful he was to the calling he had been given!

At a special Conference for Priests on Wednesday this week we were considering co-responsibility in the life and mission of the Church, focusing on our Baptism, that special Grace through which we are all – the Pope, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious, Laity – drawn into the Body of Christ. It is not the first time subjects like this have been considered of course, but they have to be returned to again and again in the context of the world in which we live. We, the Church, face new challenges in our day, and we need to listen to each other in discerning how, we, like Paul, proclaim the Gospel in our time. All of us, need to consider too how, in our situation, like Paul, we can respond with generosity to the Grace we have in knowing Christ, being loved by Him when we were incorporated into His Family at Baptism, and nurtured through the Sacraments of the Church. How do you as lay people play your part in the Mission of the Church? There are so many ways when you consider it, for example:

- Are you a parent with grown up family, maybe with children who do not know the wonder of the Sacrament of Marriage and are living in partnerships? It is not an easy topic to broach, I know. But, my mind goes to one parent who came to me with his concerns. Together we have been able to move things forward so that a Marriage recognized and blessed by the Church, with Our Lord Jesus at its heart, is now on the horizon.
- I think too of grandparents whose grandchildren have not been Baptised. How do they broach the subject: well, every situation is different, but handing on the Faith to future generations is something with which the whole Church is concerned. It is a matter again that we can work on together: if we don't, those

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children will grow into adults and their children in turn will be lost to the Truth that St Paul heard on the road to Damascus.

Yes, we talk about co-responsibility, and here are opportunities for us Priests and people to work together to witness to the Faith. In considering how to take this forward, you need look no further than the Gospel for this Sunday: Jesus is conscious of His Mission to preach the Good News; He says to the Apostles “that is why I came”. And, as you know, he was followed by so many looking for healing, that he didn’t have time often to focus on that first priority. What was he to do?

“In the morning before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” It is clear from many examples in the Gospel that this was how Jesus Himself followed the will of His Father, through being in communion with Him. Each of us can follow His example: I don’t mean leaving your area for the mountains every morning, though if you’re lucky enough to be in that situation, great! No, I mean making time in your own place to reflect and speak with God, to listen to Him speaking to you whether it is in the Gospels, through a Homily, or observing other witnesses to the Faith, like Pope Francis. Be sure this week to sort out your priorities with the Grace of the Holy Spirit and the Prayers of Mary. Then let us go forward as Paul did to “win” as many as we can for Christ.

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