



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

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

“O You of Little Faith, Why Do You Doubt?”

Reflection for the 19th Week of the Year

9 August 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“I will hear what the Lord God has to say.” (Psalm 85:9)

As I begin my Reflection I do so on the day we celebrate Our Lady of the Snows, otherwise known as the Dedication of St Mary Major Basilica. St Mary Major is one of the four Roman Basilicas known as the Patriarchal Churches in memory of the first centres of the Church. Apart from the legend that Mary produced a miraculous summer snowfall (a miracle celebrated 5th August in Rome) in recognition of the



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generosity of a Roman couple dedicated to the Mother of God, and told them to build a Church on the site, St Mary Major, which reminds us of the See of Antioch, where Mary is supposed to have spent most of her later life. The other Patriarchal Churches in Rome are St Peter's Basilica, See of Constantinople; St John Lateran representing Rome; and St Paul's Outside the Walls, the See of Alexandria. In these days we have among us Priests and Faithful from Eastern Catholic Churches whose Liturgy frequently reflects the Liturgy and Tradition practiced in those Sees. When I hear of the See of Alexandria, I am reminded of the Eritrean Catholic Church led by Father Solomon here in the Archdiocese, whose Liturgy follows the Alexandrian Rite. St Mary Major was first raised by Pope Liberius in the mid-fourth century (cf *Franciscan Media*), the Liberian Basilica was rebuilt by Pope Sixtus III shortly after the Council of Ephesus affirmed Mary's title as Mother of God in 431. As you will recall, Pope Francis, chose to be buried in that Basilica, and always went there pray at the image of Mary, *Salus Populi Romani* at the beginning and end of his Apostolic Visits to other countries. I always go to St Mary Major on any visit to Rome: giving thanks and asking her prayer.



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Theological debate over Christ's nature as God and Man reached fever pitch in Constantinople in the early 5th Century. The Chaplain of Bishop Nestorius began teaching against the little "Theotokos", Mother of God, insisting that the Virgin was mother only of the human Jesus. Nestorius agreed, ...but the people of Constantinople refuted the Bishop's teaching. When the Council of Ephesus rejected the Bishop's teaching the people took to the streets, chanting "Theotokos, Theotokos," (God Bearer or Mother of God).

I could have chosen to recall another miracle today as we reflect on the Gospel account of Jesus coming across the water to the disciples who were caught in a storm on the lake. It is the story of Brendan the Navigator, who set out to discover Paradise with his monk companions. He had a lovely prayer, quoted by Fr Joseph Pollard in *Finding Fresh Light*: "Help me, O God, for my boat is so small and your sea is so great." Pollard writes, "I am like a small boat tossed about by the storms of life. The little boat of my life is often beset by the threatening waves of temptation and failure, of stress and anxiety. Sometimes I feel I may not even get to the shore of tomorrow, never mind the shore of heaven. I am tempted to give up the ship, to lose courage, and to lose heart. The Lord is saying to me in this Gospel, "Courage Child, do not



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be afraid! Trust me!” He is saying “I am present in the storms of your life as much as in the calms of your life. Just put your trust in me at all times.” The ‘miracle’ of St Brendan reaching America in his leather boat before Columbus has been confirmed as a possibility in recent research! The ‘miracle’ of the Snow on the Esquiline Hill in Rome on 5 August 352 may be doubted too, especially in this hot summer, but a few years ago in cold, rain and hailstorms, I was more ready to accept the account!

This Sunday’s Gospel (cf Sunday Connection) follows last week’s account of feeding the 5000 with just 5 loaves and 2 fish. This week we hear that Jesus goes up onto the Mountain to pray after the crowds have been sent away. When his disciples were in difficulty on the lake due to the storm, the Lord reaches out to them walking on the lake. The disciples become fearful thinking he might be a ghost. Brendan McGuire in “Seeds for the Soul” commenting on this Sunday’s Scriptures says: “In our own lives we sometimes feel like we are sinking with the burdens of life... It seems to me that the first few lines of today’s Gospel give us a clue as to what the Lord suggests... I think we need to spend sometime, in silence, praying. We need to move to a place where we can hear the voice of God. As Elijah says (Sunday’s first



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reading) it is that whispering sound that is his voice. God does not come in earthquakes, winds or fires but in a quiet whispering sound... we really need to learn to listen to that 'quiet voice' of God."

The Sunday Connection Commentary on the Gospel concludes: "Faith in Jesus, will enable the disciples to do the work Jesus has done. Peter walks on water... when Peter fears and doubts the person of Jesus, however, he falters. Peter's example teaches us that true Christian ministry emerges from the faith that Jesus is the Messiah, God's only Son."

We ask our Mother Mary and St Brendan to journey with us in our life of Faith,

"O you of little faith, why do you doubt?" (Matthew 14:21)