



4th Week of Lent: Sunday 10 March - Handing on the Truth of Faith: Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“God sent His Son into the world....so that through Him the world might be saved”
(John 3)

Each week I enjoy preparing my Reflection on the coming Sunday's Scripture Readings at Mass: in one way or another they, especially the Gospel, renew my union with Our Lord. Because I write the Reflection to use as a Homily to share with others online as well as in Church, I insert it into the vlog "Burning Bush", (a 10 minute Pause for Prayer and Reflection). We choose pictures, a hymn, a Scripture Reading and a period of Adoration to go with it. This week while preparing Burning Bush, I saw on the website of the English Catholic History Association a picture of an ivory carving of the Deposition of the Cross: the taking down from the Cross of Jesus after His death by Joseph of Arimathea. It is a strikingly beautiful Romanesque ivory carving from the 1190s (a tiny example of what was lost in the destruction of the 1530s & 1540s) and illustrates God's love for us in giving His Son who was raised up on the Cross for us as St John tells us in the 4th Sunday of Lent. The ivory carving takes us to the 13th Station on the Way of the Cross and to the reality of Our Lord's total giving, as well as to the loving care of Joseph of Arimathea who took Him in his arms when He died. Nicodemus assisted Joseph of Arimathea in taking Jesus down from the Cross and in preparing the Body of Jesus for burial. In the Deposition by Michelangelo, Nicodemus is depicted in helping Jesus from the Cross.

In the passage from St John for the Fourth Sunday of Lent Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Son of Man will be raised up on the Cross so that those who believe in Him will have eternal life, just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent on a pole and all who looked upon it were cured, so alluding to the salvation that would be accomplished through His death and resurrection. This Sunday's Gospel is very much about looking to Jesus for healing, for light and for truth: the task of the Church is to point to Him in her teaching on how to live and the direction we should take, especially in the many issues that we face in our days. However, the reality of where people look, even some committed Catholics, is in a different direction often based on so called human rights that are anti-Christians. In the letter to the Ephesians from which the second reading is taken on the 4th Sunday of Lent we hear: *“God loved us so much....He bought us to life with Christ....We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he has meant us to live it.”* If I was called on to seek the right direction on a major issue of our day, the so-called gender theory, I would be looking to Pope Francis. In an audience with participants in a March 1-2 Conference titled "Man-Woman Image of God" the Pope said that the movement to deconstruct gender *“cancels differences”* and therefore *“cancels*

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humanity.” The Pope has called it an “extremely dangerous phenomenon that threatens genuine human rights.”

One of the most important sources of knowledge and growth in faith, our continuing life in Christ, is the Eucharist. It is here that we hear the Gospel proclaimed and here we are nurtured in the life that began in Baptism. Those joining in the National Eucharistic Congress in the United States in July this year are invited to *“participate in this pivotal moment in the Church and draw into a deeper intimacy with Our Lord.”* It is said: “The historic 5-day gathering of missionary disciples will be a new Pentecost, a powerful anointing and personal commission to invite others to know Christ.”

Just 2 weeks away is Maundy Thursday when we celebrate the Last Supper, the Memorial that draws us all into communion with Christ who offered his life; his sacred body and blood to the Father for us to lead us to new life. And He empowered His disciples to continue to celebrate this Sacrament in His memory. How precious the Eucharist is in the mission of the Church is highlighted not only every Sunday but with special events like the Eucharistic Congress in the USA. In the Diocese of Birmingham we have had a unique event for over 100 years – the Easter Monday Men’s Mass: grandfathers, sons and grandsons have come to the Cathedral (and to designated Churches in the north and south of the Diocese) which has its origins in people outside the Catholic Church questioning the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It began as a public act of witness. It is called the Men’s Mass because it began with the Catholic Men’s Society (CMS); it is not closed to women but open to everyone. There is something very special about the tradition of generations of men and boys from families making this one day special as our faith is handed on through families to future generations.

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