



Solemnity of the Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary: 14th/15th August
Reflection/Homily by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“My spirit exults in God my Saviour”

My thoughts go back to this day in my years as a student in Rome: in the heat of the summer, we were out of Rome at the Summer House, Palazzola, on Lake Albano. We made our way up the hill to Rocca di Papa on 15th August: dressed for Choir we sang at the Mass of Our Lady of the Assumption. Afterwards there was a procession down the hill accompanied by a Marching Band. For everyone it was a day of celebration, a holiday, and in the evening, there was a firework display across the Lake at Castel Gandolfo, the Pope’s summer residence in those days.

We were not always as expressive on this wonderful Feast, but at least it is on a Sunday this year and we have the opportunity this brings to mark it with due Reflection and Prayerful Solemnity. In some of our Parish Churches this will include the cultural traditions of our Ethnic Communities: I was invited to St Anthony’s, Wolverhampton, where the Cameroonian Catholic Woman’s Association will be leading the Entrance and Offertory with joyful dance and song; like Rocca di Papa, it is an experience I do not forget.

This Solemnity is being marked in Hednesford with a special Pilgrim Mass supported by Aid to the Church in Need. Under the title “Cause of Our Joy” Father Ferlita, a favourite Commentator of mine, explains Mary’s exaltation focusing on the “Magnificat” Prayer in the Gospel for the Feast. He speaks of it as her testament of Faith, and he draws on the Scripture Scholar, Barclay, who sees her Magnificat as “the most revolutionary document in the world.” He says it proclaims a “moral” revolution: God scatters the proud, “the arrogant of mind and heart”; a social revolution: “he has thrown down the [mighty] from their thrones but lifted up the lowly”; an “economic” revolution: “The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich he has sent away empty.” And, finally, a “spiritual” revolution. Mary proclaims it in the first two lines: “my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”. Ferlita explains “what this spiritual revolution overturns is what Gerard Manley Hopkins in one of his poems refers to as “world-sorrow”. Under the weight of it, he appeals to the Holy Spirit: “comforter, where is your comforting?” And then to Mary: “Mary, Mother of us, where is your relief?”

It is many years since I read the poet Chaucer’s the “Canterbury Tales”, so it was interesting to note his grandson’s name in the history of a fantastic round-tower Church in Norfolk last week. Chaucer has his “parson” speak of the “sinne of wordly-sorwe” which “worketh to the death of the soule and of the body also; for thereof comth that a man is annoyed of his owne life.” Mary proclaims a revolution against world-sorrow, this “sinne” of wordly-sorrow, this sadness that turns life into salt that has lost its savour, she overturns it by saying yes to God’s faithful love.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Aid to the Church in Need is a Charity that focusses especially, among all the needs of a suffering world, on the importance of lifting people out of what Chaucer calls “worldly sorrow”, where man is “annoyed of his own life”.

The importance of the Church in areas of conflict, suffering and oppression was something I saw at first hand when I visited countries that were emerging from Soviet domination in Europe in the 1990s. There the underground Church, had persevered: people of Faith continued to be supported by Priests, Religious and Catechists who were ready to give everything that Faithful people might be nurtured by the Sacraments and Prayer, which of course included Mary and the Cross.

I was there with the Archbishop, Maurice Couve de Murville, to offer our Catechetical and Adult Education Courses in Theology to people emerging into the light of freedom to practice their Faith again. That Faith, to which Mary’s whole being says yes; her spirit rejoices in God her Saviour; it overcomes the world and conquers death and is resurrected.

I recall the Faith of the people symbolised in the Hill of Crosses in Lithuania where the “disappeared” were remembered by the Crosses mounted in their memory by their families: suffering, even death did not break their spirit, their hope. Archbishop Tamkevicius of Kaunas (made Cardinal a few years ago) was one of those whose trust in Jesus Risen from the dead triumphed over the atheism that was being promoted, and for which he suffered imprisonment. I experienced there the support given by Aid to the Church in Need, particularly in the building of a new Seminary that was taking place at the time, and the Catechists and Religious whose courses were paid for by ACN so that they could qualify and learn from the resources we had developed, and so be equipped to pass on the Faith in a new era.

Then, particularly relevant today among the countries we visited, was Ukraine. The people who had been oppressed by the Soviet Union following the Second World War, and many of whom became the Diaspora Church we know in this country, were emerging into the new era of freedom in the 1990s. I saw the vital role of ACN there, again supporting Priests, Religious and Catechists especially to hand on the precious Faith that we celebrate on the Feast of the Assumption, the Faith that raises us above the Cross. Included in that was the restoration and building of Churches and Centres; the provision of transport and so on. The Faith that gives people hope and strength we see in so many places under attack today: Ukraine once more, Nigeria, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria to mention just a small number.

Mary, the Church teaches, is where Christ is, the first to see His glory. Her joy is complete. Ferlita asks “Mary, Mother of us, where is your relief?” He answers: “where Christ is, is the only answer. And she wishes it for us with the same intensity as Christ. We believe this: Blessed are we for believing. And we celebrate it, even as we journey toward it.

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Thank God for all who pass on the Faith of Mary, not least ACN in places of conflict and oppression for people of Faith. We speak a lot today of people's mental health and the need to care about it. Have no doubt our Catholic Faith contributes to our living lives of hope and mental wellbeing. "My spirit exults in God my Saviour".

Let us live it and pass it on.

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