



Mgr McHugh

Reflection / Vlog – 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Easter – “the Touch of Love”

I came across this poster on the internet: it reads “The Universe has shaken you to awaken you”. In this rich part of the world we have been travelling on: thinking about Brexit and how we could be better off if we were free from the constraints of the European Commission and free to make ourselves new deals and become even richer. Suddenly, a plague has hit us, the Coronavirus, and we are feeling helpless, unsure and frightened. I don’t think the poster I saw is of Christian origin, but it speaks volumes: we have been like the man in the parable who had to build bigger barns because he had so much grain and one night God took him! What became of his bigger barns then?

For us, in the community of believers in Jesus it sends us back to basics because at this time of year especially we are thinking, reflecting, praying about Jesus and his teaching on suffering, the Cross, new life and Resurrection. All we are experiencing, worrying about, makes us ask “what does our Faith teach us in this situation?” The prayer of Pope Francis at his Urbi et Orbi Blessing on Easter Sunday went like this: “May Christ who has already defeated death and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, dispel the darkness of our suffering humanity and lead us into the light of his glorious day, a day that knows no end.” The Square in front of St Peter’s was empty where normally there would be 100,000 people. And, yet, in a strange way, as on Good Friday in the evening when he led the Stations of the Cross, there were more people present than ever before: people all over the world look to this spiritual man to lead us through this time of darkness to light.

I have started writing this reflection on Thursday of the first week of Easter: it follows on the beautiful Gospel of the 2 men on the road to Emmaus. They were downcast because their dreams were being shattered: all they hoped for in Jesus seemed to be over. It was the Risen Lord who came up and walked with them, though they did not recognise him, sitting at the table and Breaking Bread He opened their minds to see the way He took was the way to true life, to fulfilment, and that is what we are focusing on in this time after Easter.

I share with you the story on the phoenix bird given by Fr Anthony Kadavil for Easter Sunday. He writes: “The late Catholic Archbishop of Hartford USA, John Whealon, (died on August 2, 1991), had undergone cancer surgery resulting in a permanent colostomy when he wrote these very personal words in one of his last Easter messages: “I am now a member of an association of people who have been wounded by cancer. That association has as its symbol the phoenix, a bird of Egyptian mythology. The Greek poet Hesiod, who lived eight centuries before Jesus was born, wrote about this legendary bird in his poetry. When the bird felt its death was near (every 500 to 1,461 years), it would fly off to Phoenicia, build a nest of aromatic wood and set itself on fire. When the bird was consumed by the flames, a new phoenix sprang forth from the ashes. Thus, the phoenix symbolizes immortality, resurrection, and life after death. It sums up the Easter

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message perfectly. Jesus gave up His life, and from the grave He was raised to life again on the third day. New life rises from the ashes of death. That is why the phoenix was one of the earliest symbols of the Risen Christ. The phoenix also symbolizes our daily rising to new life. Every day, like the phoenix, we rise from the ashes of sin and guilt and are refreshed and renewed by our living Lord and Savior with His forgiveness and the assurance that He still loves us and will continue to give us the strength we need." Archbishop John Whealon could have lived in a gloomy tomb of self-pity, hopeless defeat, and chronic sadness, but his Faith in the Risen Lord opened his eyes to new visions of life."

The whole world is experiencing a crisis: there is a need for guidance to accompany us. Thank God for the central truths of our Faith given us in Jesus. And, thank God for the leadership of Pope Francis who helps us understand the meaning of what we are living through.

Let us take to heart the words of St John in the reading from the Book of Apocalypse for this Sunday in Year C: "When I saw Him, I fell in a dead faint at his feet, but He touched me with His right hand and said, "Do not be afraid; it is I the First and the Last; I am the Living One. I was dead and now I am to live for ever and ever."

It is in this spirit that we have the courage to look ahead, to roll away the tombstones that inhibit us from playing our part in giving people hope at this time – maybe it's just the touch of love that comes in a phone call or text that's needed.

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