



Second week in Ordinary Time 15/16 January 2023 – Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

*“You are worth more than all the gold in the world.”*

This is a saying of Cardinal Cardijn the founder of the Young Christian Workers’ Movement begun in Belgium in 1924. Cardijn’s mission as a young priest was to bring young working people to Christ. On Tuesday this week I met with the National Chaplain and National Lay Organiser with a view to them coming to the next Ethnic Chaplaincy Day to explain its method. One of our priorities is reaching out to young people and drawing them into the life of the Church. Personally, I found the Y.C.W a wonderful organisation that helped me and other young priests to call and form young adults for mission. Key is choosing young adult leaders and using Y.C.W methodology to train them: it starts with the group of young people looking at their life situation and considering that life and work in relation to the Gospel and Social Teaching of the Church. This leads to a desire to apply the Teaching of Christ to real life. The method is called See, Judge, Act.

The role of the priest is like that of John the Baptist when Jesus was beginning His mission as recounted in the Gospel of St John this 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the year. John says, “Yes, I have seen and I am witness that He is the Chosen One of God”. Gradually, rather like the Apostles were called and formed by Jesus, young working people are called and formed by the priest. Today more than ever Lay Leaders assist the priest to accompany young people in their time of formation.

I was blessed as a young priest to be introduced to the process in my first pastoral appointment. I find today, some 50 years later, that many of those who are now parents and grandparents and who play a part in a variety of ways in the mission of the Church, were in the Y.C.W Movement. You can imagine that I want to introduce the Movement to the Chaplains to the Ethnic Communities I work with today, and the National Chaplain and Lay Organiser will do so at our next Ethnic Chaplains Day in February.

The Church of course is always looking for ways to form young people (and adults too) to be “missionary disciples”. In South America we heard a great deal in the 1970’s and 80’s about Liberation Theology and the building of Church Cells to bring the Gospel to the poor. There was some suspicion of this (as there was of Cardijn in his early days). Some were saying it could lead to a Church that supported the Left and Communism in Latin America. I was especially interested in the position taken by the late Pope Benedict XVI on Liberation Theology. An article interviewing Josef Sayer, ex-Misereor boss, might surprise some! Misereor is the German Catholic Bishops’ Organisation for Development Cooperation. For over 60 years Misereor has been committed to fighting poverty in Africa, Asia and Latin America. What was Pope Benedict’s attitude to Liberation Theology?

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There was suspicion of it in Rome, but Benedict went to see for himself. In 2007, when he was already Pope, Sayer recalls that he gave the opening address at the 5<sup>th</sup> General Conference of CELAM (The Latin American Bishop Conference) held at Aparecida, where opponents wanted him to bring down the “option for the poor” once and for all. Instead, Benedict, the well-known Theologian and, now Pope, settled the debate saying that the “option for the poor” was rooted in Christ’s Teaching. Interestingly, the final document was edited by one Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis!

We face many challenges in our time to take the Lord Jesus, “the Light of the Nations”, as is said in Isaiah, (the first Reading for the Second Sunday) to the world. The wonderful Hymn recommended for this Sunday Mass, ‘And did those feet’ (Jerusalem) written in the 1800’s by William Blake says, “And was Jerusalem built here among those dark satanic mills?”. The Industrial Revolution had its dark side, as well as creating much wealth. The Hymn concludes, “I will not cease from mental fight, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, till we have built Jerusalem in England’s green and pleasant land”. The enthusiasm is palpable. We are called to point to the Lamb of God in our time as John the Baptist did in his day.

As we begin the New Year 2023, we proclaim with faith and courage the words of the Psalm, “Here I am Lord! I come to do your will”. And, when it comes to young people, we take to heart those words of Cardijn: “You are worth more than all the gold in the world”.

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