



11th Week of the Year in Ordinary Time 16 June 2024

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father” (Alleluia Verse 11th Sunday)

Whenever possible I listen to “Thought for the Day” on Radio 4. When I heard Prof. Wilkinson from Durham University speak on Monday this week, I engaged immediately. He was speaking about the phenomenon Taylor Swift, the extraordinary Pop Star who is on tour and thrilling thousands upon thousands in Edinburgh. His wife and daughter had gone to one of the concerts and, as a Theologian, he was reflecting on what it is that attracts so many to become fans: “Swifties”. He spoke of her giving permission to followers *“to believe that their interior lives matter”* and of *“Swift empowering the stories of others”*.

Reading the Metro Newspaper later I found an article by Danni Scott who had attended the show and wrote *“the whole thing felt like a religious experience. I’ve always loved Taylor Swift for her ability to articulate in song what I’m feeling at various points in my life, so hearing it all live was overwhelming.”* Clearly she is a great communicator, who writes her own material that appeals to a certain sector of people. The article by Scott ends *“Take us to Church, Taylor”*, though it’s not known whether she is “religious” or not.

This week we Priests of the Archdiocese had a 2 day ‘Ongoing Formation’ Programme entitled “The Synod for Priests: The Joy of Priesthood”, there was a special focus on the Gospel Story of “Martha and Mary” which points to the tension in ourselves between being *“busy about many things”* and the importance of *“sitting at the Lord’s feet”* to *“listen to His teaching”*. As Priests we need to have time to listen to the Lord in prayer and reflection and reading, as well as being out there as Pastors meeting the many demands on our time. More than once the question of “communication” came up *“how do we reach out with the heart of the Gospel in the world of today?”* I was struck by the quotation Archbishop Bernard closed with: it was from one of our Priests at our Ongoing Formation Days *“I cannot shepherd those I can’t love.”* If Taylor Swift teaches us all something, it is the truth of that quotation in communication to her fans in the field of pop music.

This Sunday the Gospel is about the Kingdom of God and we see Jesus teaching his apostles about that Kingdom through parables: he begins with an image familiar to his listeners, The Mustard Tree, but He also focuses on something that is important in their

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lives. What is important to people is being argued about at this 'Election' time: for example in Scotland the "Independence" issue has receded as people struggle with "the cost of living". Coming back from Ongoing Formation yesterday I arrived just in time to be in the "Congregation" for the Cremation Ceremony of one of my neighbours in the block of Apartments where I live. The heart of the Memorial Ceremony conducted by a lay woman was the Eulogy and Family Memories, but it was interesting to see how much it was influenced by Christian Memories: the Entrance music of 'The Old Rugged Cross'; Reflection music 'The Lord of the Dance'; Exit music, 'Time to Say Goodbye' by Sarah Brightman and Andrea Bocelli. There were no Prayers or Scripture Readings or Hymns sung, but there were two beautiful poems: one 'God's Garden' ended:

*"It broke our hearts to lose you
But you didn't go alone,
For part of us went with you
The day God called you home"*

It seemed to me the Kingdom of God, His reign was already present, but it needed the Priest to speak to the situation, to identify the points where the message of Jesus and the teaching of the Church about prayer and ultimate joy in the fulness of life in God's Kingdom bring even greater riches to a life well lived. There are special moments when people are open to the good news of the Kingdom and passing from this life is one. Another is a more "in house" opportunity which comes up this Sunday: Father's Day: I noted the poem read by the granddaughter of the man whose Funeral I attended yesterday, had these words:

*"Our Grandad kept a garden,
A garden of the heart;
He planted all the good things
That gave our lives their start"*

There were 2 more verses and then:

*"His constant good example,
Always taught us right from wrong,
Markers for our pathway
That will last a lifetime long.*

*We are his legacy.
Thank you, Grandad,
We love you"*

Dads and Grandads can be encouraged this Sunday: they have a key part in building the Kingdom of God, helped by the Scriptures, the Sacraments and the Prayer of the Church. I think they will buy-in to love and their legacy; their contribution may seem to be like a

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small mustard seed, but it can become the bush/the family where so many grandchildren find their way to the fulness of life.

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