



5th Week of Easter: 15th/16th May 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The Lord of the Dance.”

I am looking forward to conducting the marriage of a young couple at the end of this month: this is special, not only because it has taken almost 3 years to get it arranged due to the disruption of COVID, but also because the Bride was the first to take on a regular commitment to read at Mass in the Parish Church at weekends at the tender age of 10, back in 2005. Until that time, it was the preserve of adults.

It was very pleasing to be asked by her years later to be the Celebrant at her marriage. The marriage preparation has been lengthy because it has been disrupted by new regulations and postponement due to COVID. At the same time, meetings with the couple have often taken place outside my apartment (where I live since leaving the Parish Priest Accommodation), in CAFÉ NERO, where I have enjoyed many Flat Whites, and very well appointed and comfortable chairs and tables to hold our discussions. We have recently reached the stage of final preparations for the ceremony, and the Booklet/Brochure has been printed.

The Hymns, like the Readings, are the choice of the couple, though the Priest looks over it before the final production. I noted the choice of the Hymn “Lord of the Dance” arranged by Sydney Carter. When he died in 2004 it was said in his obituary that “Lord of the Dance” was “the most celebrated religious song of the 20th Century”. It captured the spirit of the 1960s protest movement in the United States, and while for some the accompaniment of folk acoustic guitar was bordering on heresy, for others, this type of music and song was a breath of fresh air. “Lord of the Dance” brought this folk sound and spirit into the Church, especially in services designed to reach young people. Clearly, it had impacted on the Bride years after it was composed; and many of his songs remain popular in schools right down to today. Carter wrote “I see Christ as the incarnation of the Piper who is calling us. He dances that shape and pattern which is at the heart of our reality.” “The final stanza captures the untainted joy of the Resurrection when the dance is complete, and all are invited – ‘I’ll live in you if you live in me’”, writes Michael Hawn in his “History of Hymns.” Carter placed the primary emphasis on Faith rather than Creeds and the language of Theology and asserted “Scriptures and Creeds may come to seem incredible, but Faith will go dancing on.” Yet, he wrote, “I sing of the dancing pattern in the life and words of Jesus.”

Using the term “Dance” to describe our relationship with Christ and His mission to the world in one sense is not new. I remember very well my visit to Cappadocia in Turkey some years ago: it is an amazing place, and the home to some of the great Eastern Fathers of the Church, such as St Basil and St Gregory of Nyssa, who described the Holy Trinity as a “Round Dance”. Brother Elias Marechal, a Monk of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia, writes of the Round Dance as “An infinite current of love

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streams without ceasing, to and fro, to and fro, to and fro: gliding from the Father to the Son, and back to the Father, in one timeless happening. This circular current of Trinitarian love continues night and day". Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell write in "The Divine Dance: The Trinity and your Transformation": "At the heart of Christian Revelation, God is not seen as a distant, static monarch but a 'divine circle dance', as the early Fathers of the Church dared to call it (in Greek 'perichoresis', the origin of our world 'choreography') God is the Holy One presented in the dynamic and loving action of three".

Father Ferlita in his commentary on the readings for the Fifth Sunday of Easter refers to the Reading from the Apocalypse on the New Jerusalem, the holy city where God will make His dwelling in the midst of the people. The one on the throne says, "Behold I make all things new." Ferlita asks "How? By His love. How else? God is love. The Son receives everything from the Father and returns it all to the Spirit. That movement – from the Father through the Son in the Spirit – is a movement of love. It is what Gregory of Nyssa calls "The Round Dance of the Blessed Holy Trinity". And we are drawn into that Dance, caught up in the movement of love."

As my young couple take the floor for the first dance at their wedding celebration, they are caught up in the movement of love; as Sydney Carter wrote: "I am the life that'll never, never die. I'll live in you if you live in me: I am the Lord of the Dance, said he."

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