



16th Week of Ordinary Time 17th/18th July
Reflection/Homily by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“I stand at the door and knock”

These words from the Book of Revelation Ch3 Verse 20 are to be found as a Communion Antiphon for the 16th Sunday of the Year. I recall, as many of you will, the famous painting by Holman Hunt, “The Light of the World”. It hangs in Keble College, Oxford; the writing under the picture, which is hard to read, is taken from Revelations 3: “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me.” The title of the picture refers to Jesus’ words “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8: 12). Another version of the painting which has “travelled the world” for exhibitions, is to be found in St Paul’s Cathedral. The account of it on the website describes it as a “sermon in a frame” and informs us that it was received there in June 1908 and on that day the choir sang Psalm 119 which includes the verse: “your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

It is little wonder then that the words of the Antiphon were chosen for the 16th Sunday where the Gospel is about Martha and Mary. Mary “sat down at the Lord’s feet and listened to him” writes St Luke. Martha, on the other hand “was distracted by all the serving.”

The story of Martha and Mary complements the Parable of the Good Samaritan which was read last week. The focus is on the Kingdom of God, eternal life, in Chapter 10 of St Luke. To inherit eternal life we are told: “you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself”. Jesus says: “Do this and life is yours”. The Parable spells this out in terms of love thy neighbour; on the other hand the story of Martha and Mary illustrates how love of God is to be shown in our lives. Just as the Parable of the Good Samaritan shows that goodness is to be found in every race and creed, so in choosing Mary as the central person to teach us about love of God, Jesus teaches that the woman, who was very much in the background of Judaism, is the exemplar of openness to God and love of His Word. This story takes us to the heart of the teaching of Jesus about His Kingdom: we are first and foremost to listen to God in our lives. We see this in the life of Jesus Himself, particularly in St Luke’s Gospel, where in the business of His Mission, He always makes time to go to the mountain to pray, to listen to His Father.

As I write this Reflection, I am aware that the weekend of the 16th Sunday includes the Memorial of Our Lady of Mount Carmel: it was on this beautiful mountain that the Prophet Elijah defended the purity of Israel’s Faith. It was on this Mountain that in the 12th Century Hermits went to spend time in contemplation under the patronage of Our Lady, the Model of Religious Life. It was here that the Carmelite Order had its origins, a sign for us today of the need to be close to God, open to the light of the world.

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St Paul's Website tells of the layers of meaning in the Holman Hunt Painting:

"There are actually two lights shown in the picture – the lantern, which is that of conscience and the light around the head of Christ, the light of salvation. The door represents the human soul: its lack of a handle, the rusty nails and its hinges overgrown with ivy are intended to show that it has never been opened – and the figure of Christ is asking permission to enter.

The morning star appears near Christ – the dawn of a new day – and the autumn weeds and fallen fruit, representing the autumn of life. The writing beneath the picture is taken from Revelation 3:16 "Behold I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you, and you with me."

These meaningful words lead me back to the words of Abraham in the Book of Genesis – the first reading for the 16th Sunday – where the visit of the Lord to Abraham and Sarah is described. Abraham and Sarah bowed down: "My Lord", he said, "I beg you, if I find favour with you, kindly do not pass your servant by..."

Like Mary, may we too choose the "better part."

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