



Third Week of Easter: 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> May 2022  
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“My Ways: Ways of Light.”**

This past week I have enjoyed being in the Bari and Lecce area of Southern Italy as part of a celebration of my 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday. I have often thought of going there: many of us remember that Bari is the place where the relics of St Nicholas (Father Christmas) are and it has a very fine Basilica, and in the country round there the famous Trulli houses (very popular with holiday makers) are to be found, not to mention the fact that the area is famous for its wonderful food (Puglia Cuisine), and of course exciting Church buildings!

When I go to an area such as this I have in mind the possibility of a Podcast or two as an outcome: St Nicholas will certainly feature before long though his Feast Day is not until the 6<sup>th</sup> December, but so will another great witness to the Faith, St Oronzio, who took the Faith to Lecce in the time of St Paul, the first century.

As well as thinking of the possibility of material for the Podcast telling our Faith story which I see as part of my “evangelization” role as a Priest, I had in mind the 10-minute pause for Reflection and Prayer VLOG: “Burning Bush”, which a team of us create each week connected to the Scripture readings for the following Sunday. This week we had the Third Week of Easter in mind, and especially the first of the Sunday readings, from the Acts of the Apostles, and the Gospel, which is taken from St John in the third cycle of readings. At the same time, I was aware that May, the month of Mary begins this coming week. Well, I had a Feast of material from the life and practice of the Faith in that area of Apuglia to illustrate key points I had in mind for this time of year in the Church’s Liturgy, together with links to life in the world today, and the witness of the Church in our time.

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles speaks of the witness of the Apostles to the Resurrection of Our Lord: the opposition there was to their teaching even to the point of suffering for speaking of His Resurrection. The reading concludes with these words: “they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name”. If I wanted to take a wonderful example of how Christians through the centuries have similarly witnessed to the truth of Jesus even to the point of death, I need not have gone further than this part of Apuglia, to Otranto in particular. Together with Bari it was one of the last Byzantine cities to fall to the Normans. In the time of the Crusades it was an important embarkation point for the Orient. In 1480 the Turkish Fleet attacked the City and slaughtered the inhabitants: the 800 survivors were promised their lives if they would renounce their Christian Faith, but none did so. They were killed on the nearby hill of Minerva together with their executioner, who confessed himself a Christian after witnessing the unwavering Faith of his victims. I saw the Lady Chapel where many of their relics are venerated. I also noted the declaration “Towards a Synodal Church” of the Archdiocese of Otranto, posted in the

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Cathedral to mark the Synod 2021-2023. It speaks of the light of “hope” that every person seeks, and prays to the Martyrs of Otranto, Antonio Primaldo and Companions (they were canonized by Pope Francis in Rome, May 2013) that they will help the Faithful of the Diocese “not to give way to discouragement in that witness; and that in listening to God’s Word, the celebration of the Eucharist, personal prayer and community interaction they may be happy companions to those who seek that light of Hope.”

As we read the Gospel for the Third Sunday we are conscious first that it has another account from St John of a post Resurrection encounter with Jesus. I saw it is impossible to enter a Church in Puglia and not be aware of Jesus Risen: in every Sanctuary there is a statue of Jesus Risen in a prominent place in Eastertide. It is in the context of a meal with Jesus that reminds us of the Eucharist and Jesus’ care for His flock that Peter is given his special role of service in love. We all have a share in that, guided by Mary whose month begins on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May. It was especially pleasing, given my entrusting of my service as Co-Ordinator of Ethnic Chaplaincies to Our Lady of Good Counsel, that this Feast is marked in a special way in Lecce with a Mass and Procession from the Church of the Jesu on 26<sup>th</sup> April. I attended Mass there and witnessed the Procession led by a “typical Italian band”, and the Confraternity carrying her statue. However, it was in the Church of St Matthew that I found the image of Mary I wanted to display on the Ethnic Chaplaincies “Burning Bush” VLOG: the remains of an early fresco of Mary and the Child Jesus with the title “My Ways: Ways of Light”. Let us look to Our Lady as our special “Good Counsellor” on the Journey of Faith in this special year of the Synodal Church, walking together in Faith.

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