



Seventh Week of Ordinary Time: 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> February 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“Open our heart, O Lord, to accept the words of your Son.”**

This week I had the opportunity to meet with two other Priests, both of whom have retired as Parish Priests and are taking on other pastoral work. We were students together in Rome and from different dioceses in different parts of this country. All of us had enjoyed and benefitted greatly from studying in Rome in an international community; and we enjoyed too the game of Rugby which brought us up against Italian teams from parts around Rome and English teams too, famously the Navy who would come into Rome on leave from ships at Civitavecchia.

In the course of conversation, we recalled other students with whom we studied: some still alive, others sadly departed. Some of course flourished in Priestly life, others had left Priesthood to marry, and remained in touch. Some had not gone all the way to Priesthood and left before Ordination.

We reflected a good deal on Priestly Training and how it might be re-modelled to meet the needs of a Church that has changed significantly since the time we started out in the 1960s. Interestingly, given the thrust of the Scripture readings for the Seventh Sunday, we recalled two students who never got on in Seminary, and didn't speak to each other. Something had happened between them and forgiveness and compassion had not won out, despite the special vocation we have. We were a bit shocked by it I think, but we reconciled to the reality.

When I looked at the readings for the Mass on the Seventh Sunday my eyes fell on the words of the Alleluia Verse “Open our hearts, O Lord, to accept the words of your Son.”

We are challenged once more not just to be reconciled to the reality of our own lack of forgiveness and compassion, but to examine and confront it.

A Greek Proverb “Know all and you will pardon all” strikes me as a good starting point in assessing our attitudes in this area. It seems to me; it puts in another way the words of Our Lord on the Cross “Father forgive them for they know not what they do”.

Father Francis Drinkwater, who was much heralded as a Catechist across Europe and started the Sower Magazine for teachers and catechists, believed a great deal in the power of story. This was one he told:

“Rabbi Leo Beck, a German Scholar who took on the leadership of the German Jews in Hitler's time, is a fine example of forgiveness. He was five times arrested, and finally sent to a concentration camp, where he served on the Convicts' Committee of Management. On the very day he was to be shot, the Russian Troops arrived. Beck could

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have escaped at once, but stayed behind to argue with the Russians, to persuade them to spare the lives of the German camp-guards. The Russians decided the camp-guards should be handed over to the inmates. Beck then argued with the inmates and managed to persuade them not to take the vengeance they were thirsting for. Later on he went to the USA and worked hard for the Council of Christians and Jews. He died in 1957, aged 80." An inspirational story.

The Gospel for the Seventh Sunday continues the teaching of Our Lord called the Sermon on the Plain in St Luke's Gospel which is directed to the disciples. It constitutes the crux and the challenge of what it means to be a disciple. It challenges us to be more like God. God loves us beyond our expectations, beyond anything we can possibly imagine. God has forgiven us and invited us to His table at the Eucharist. Then he asks us to pass on this generosity and forgiveness to others.

As you may know, I work with others to produce a weekly VLOG called Burning Bush (Moses came into the presence of God at the Burning Bush) and I encourage those who watch it to spend 10 minutes in quiet prayer and reflection using it as a prompt. Normally, we use two pictures in the first section; I suggested we have an image of the potter creating a new piece of pottery. Ian and Damien came up with a beautiful picture of the potter at work: if feel it is an image of God's work with each one of us. Whatever our age or stage in life, He is continuing to "mold and fashion" us as the hymn says. That is why I suggested we pray those words from the Alleluia Verse "open our heart, O Lord, to accept the words of your Son" as we reflect on the Gospel for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday. We can't be reconciled to our sinful 'reality' but we also know we need the power of the Holy Spirit to change. The words of the Hymn come to mind as we pray

"Breath on me, breath of God,  
fill me with life anew.  
that I may love what thou dost love,  
and do what thou wouldst do"

The journey of Faith goes on; no retirement here!

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