



Third Week of Lent: 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> March 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“I will give you a new Spirit, says the Lord” Ezekiel 36:26**

Amid the death and destruction being measured out on the people of Ukraine we see also, thank God, wonderful signs of goodness and love. I was especially moved to see on the internet a video post of the way children in a school in Italy welcomed the refugee children from Ukraine: with flags, music, clapping and waving. Having experienced the most awful bombardment and the worst of humanity, now they were receiving a healing embrace. The wonderful story of the Barren Fig Tree in the Gospel for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent points to the fact that the Fig Tree may not bear fruit but don't destroy it because it may yet bear fruit. Jesus sees that though humanity may often display sinfulness and lack of the fruit of love and care, deep down it is part of our nature and given nurturing and the right conditions we often see evidence of it. So much of the goodness I see being poured out by people opening their homes, and Government reaching out to support refugees, is a modern day parable of the Fig Tree: given the right conditions as people and society we can rise to the challenge the Lord gives us this Lent; to be less centered on ourselves, more open to the needs of others.

The terrible tragedy of Ukraine's war has brought to life the seemingly dead self-centered day-to-day life we are asked to examine at the time of Lent. Every day, we see and hear stories of people giving materially and financially, and opening their homes to those in need. And, the Lord who is called the “Lord of Compassion and Love” in the Psalm is vindicated. We are given new encouragement at this stage of Lent: some of us may not feel we have achieved much yet in changing our lives, but we are reassured in the Gospel. The Lord sees the goodness in us, and we have to dispose ourselves to the Holy Spirit who is so evident in the way the schools in Italy open their doors; and the people at the border of Ukraine give out blankets and other goods to those who come with nothing.

My attention was drawn on the BBC recently to the story of Chile's Atacama Desert: the “desierto florido” (flowering dessert) phenomenon occurs every five to seven years when rains cause buried seeds to germinate and flower. In 2017 the bloom came after a particularly colourful flowering in 2015. More than 200 species of plant have been found to grow in the area. The spectacle draws visitors and botanists from Chile and further afield. Suddenly the arid dessert is alive with flowers as different species germinate at different times. From afar the flowers look like snowfall; colours vary from white, to yellow, to purple.

When we step back from the business of life and allow the sun of God's love to flower in us during Lent through prayer, we can be surprised at the new life we see in our lives and that of others. The words of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday's Psalm encourage us:

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese

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THE ARCHDIOCESE of BIRMINGHAM

## Ethnic Chaplaincies

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*“My soul give thanks to the Lord and never forget all his blessings. It is he who forgives all your guilt  
who heals everyone of your ills,  
who redeems your life from the grave,  
who crowns you with love and compassion”*

My sister is now retired from her rehabilitation clinic where she employed nurses from different parts of the world; some came from Ukraine. She made contact to express her sadness at what is taking place in their home country. A simple straightforward thing to do, but much appreciated by them as they are concerned for loved ones back home. This morning - St Patrick's Day - they rang her to wish her a happy St Patrick's Day. Something she appreciated and shared with me. Little things mean a lot.

Pope Francis tweeted *“For the followers of Jesus, now is not a time for sleeping, for letting our souls be sedated. One of the great tragedies of our time is the refusal to open our eyes to reality and instead to look the other way. #PrayTogether #Ukraine #Peace”*

Lord make me know your ways, teach me your paths this Lent.

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

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