



2nd Week of Lent: Sunday 25 February: Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“How can I renounce the King who saved me” (St Polycarp Feast 23 Feb)

Why did Alexei Navalny return to Russia after there had been an attempt to poison him? I've heard that question more than once since he has died at a jail in the Arctic Circle. The anti-corruption campaigner had almost died 4 years ago and on his return to Russia he was imprisoned for 30 years. I was very interested to hear Rev Professor David Wilkinson on Thought for the Day on BBC Radio 4 this week give an answer. He quoted Navalny saying in an interview *“if I want people to trust me, I must share risks with them”*. He chose to be vulnerable with the vulnerable; I thought that is what Jesus Himself did, and paid the price. Navalny had been atheist but became a Christian and he is said to have quoted Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”* Jesus knew that ultimately his way would lead to triumph, as of course it did. It strikes me that as we make the Stations of the Cross in Lent we are ever more conscious of Jesus standing with us in the crosses we carry and encouraging us to continue on the way that leads to new life.

The passage from St Mark's Gospel that is put before us by the Church on the Second Sunday of Lent comes after Jesus' prediction of the Passion: six days earlier He said he *“must suffer greatly and be rejected ... and be killed and rise after three days.”* You remember Peter rebuked him for saying so and in turn Jesus rebuked him saying *“Get behind me Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”*

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem and he pauses with three of His disciples to go apart to pray on a high mountain. Jesus always sought His Father's will in prayer. Ernest Ferlita in his commentary sees Him seeking confirmation asking *“Am I doing your will in setting my face towards Jerusalem?”* On the mountain with Peter, James and John, he receives the confirmation He seeks. He is configured before them, Elijah the great prophet, and Moses, the lawgiver appears beside him talking to him. About what? St Luke in his Gospel says they spoke of *“the Exodus He was to achieve in Jerusalem”* (9:31). The Exodus recalls the exit of God's People from captivity in Egypt, through the desert to the Promised Land. For Jesus, it is to pass over through the Cross into glory. God confirms in the Transfiguration what He wants from His Son. To the disciples He says in St Mark *“This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.”* (Mk 9:7)

Ferlita in his commentary quotes George McCauley in *“The Unfinished Image”*, 89 saying *“What God wills is that He ‘share in solidarity our human conditions’, a solidarity that will bring Him to his death, yes, death on a cross. Like Abraham (of Sunday's First Reading from Genesis 22), Jesus goes on a journey, trusting that God is able to raise Him from the dead.”*

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



On Sunday last I was celebrating Mass for my priest friend in St Joseph's and St Paul's, Kings Norton. The Deacon, Peter, was showing me the different versions of the Stations of the Cross the Parishioners would have starting on the First Sunday of Lent. The 'Stations' are one of the devotions the Church offers in Lent to help us become more aware of the love and solidarity of Jesus with our human condition, the crosses we bear, and others bear in parts of the world where there is oppression and persecution.

This 2nd week of Lent, and in light of the Sunday Gospel, we could think about going apart for a time to consider, as Jesus did, what God, the Father, wants from me, what is God's will for me? Making the Stations of the Cross in our Parish is one evident way of doing this; another is to purchase a version of the Stations to pray quietly at home or on a walk. Personally I found the Stations of the Cross with Mary which have been erected at Walsingham very beautiful for personal prayer; they can be purchased from the Bookshop at the Shrine. The concluding Prayer in those Stations is taken from St Faustina, the Apostle of Divine Mercy:

"You expired, Jesus, but the source of life gushed forth for souls, and the ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world O Blood and Water which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You." (St Faustina's Diary)

Leading up to the 2nd Week of Lent we have an inspirational Saint from the early years of the Church: St Polycarp of Smyrna. Some years ago on holiday I visited the Church dedicated to him in Smyrna, now Izmir in present day Turkey. He was about eighty-six (the Diocesan Ordo records) when the Roman pro-consul urged him to renounce Christ and save his life, St Polycarp replied, *"For eighty-six years I have served him and he has never wronged me. How can I renounce the King who saved me?"*

Thank God for the example of St Polycarp, other Saints and inspirational human beings, as we renew our commitment to follow the way of Jesus this Lent.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese