



**12th Week of the Year, St Peter and St Paul
25 and 29 June 2023**

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The Lord is on my side, a mighty hero” (Jeremiah 20)

If you doubt that the devil is alive and active, you need only reflect on the news brought to us by the media this week of people paying to see animals being abused and tortured; and this being livestreamed for the pleasure of those who were ready to pay for it. The case making the headlines was the torturing of monkeys. I suppose I shouldn't be shocked, given the evil that is being done to human beings in different parts of the world, and that sometimes touches our lives too.

The image that came to my mind to show God's standing with us in times of suffering and evil, is the famous Epstein bronze sculpture of St. Michael's victory over the devil, displayed on the southeast wall of the new Coventry Cathedral. It speaks to our belief that Christ is victorious over evil, and that he didn't reject the cup of His own suffering because ultimately He trusted in His Father's will for Him.

Ferlita in his reflection for the 12th Sunday, in his book “Paths of Life”, tells the story of Jean Donovan, a lay missionary murdered in El Salvador in 1980, along with three missionary sisters. In one of her last letters she wrote: *“The peace corps left today and my heart sank low. The danger is extreme and they were right to leave Now I must assess my own position because I am not up for suicide. Several times I have decided to leave. I almost could, except for the children, the poor bruised victims of adult lunacy. Who would care for them? Whose heart would be so staunch as to favour the reasonable thing in a sea of tears and helplessness? Not mine, dear friend, not mine.”*

Ferlita reflects: The “reasonable thing” would have been to leave; she opted to stay. Was she afraid? How could she not have been? But that fear was balanced by her faith in God, by her confidence, rooted in the love of Christ that in heeding the cry of the poor she was answering God's call.

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Ferlita goes on to point out the words of Jesus in the Gospel for the 12th Sunday: *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So, there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.”*

“These are deeply reassuring words” Ferlita writes; “and yet they clearly imply that in God’s providence one might indeed have to suffer and die for the sake of the kingdom” ... “Jesus had to drink the cup to its last bitter drop, and yet, we are told he was heard. Yes, God answered his prayer by raising him from the dead.”

In the coming week we celebrate Saints Peter and Paul, the great Apostles of Faith in Jesus Risen from the Dead. In his witness, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter spoke of the Angel the Lord sent to save him from Herod and those who were determined to bring that witness to an end. The Psalm for the Feast is Psalm 33 with the response “The angel of the Lord rescues those who revere him”.

St Paul writes in 2 Timothy “I have fought the good fight to the end; I have seen the race to the finish; I have kept the Faith; all there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his Appearing.

Looking for suitable pictures to go with our weekly blog “Burning Bush” former parishioners of mine, Damian and Ian, came up with images of Peter and Paul on a stone sealing the tomb of a young boy Asellus. Ian wrote: *“The slab closed the tomb of a boy named Asellus, who died before the age of seven and was buried in the cemetery of Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina. On the right the short text of the epigraph is arranged, written in irregular characters in rather inaccurate Latin, as is typical of later inscriptions (those dating from the end of the fourth century). On the left there are the faces of the apostles Peter and Paul, with respective captions, alongside a Christological monogram (combination of chi and rho, the first two letters of the Greek name Christs). The faces, distinguished by their intense gaze, create two simple but very effective “portraits”, faithful to the canonical features attributed to the two saints in the ancient Church. Ideally, it was the intention of whoever prepared the tomb that the little Asellus (“little donkey”, probably an affectionate nickname) should be entrusted in the Hereafter to the two revered patrons of the Roman Church.”*

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The word “Angel” means God’s messenger: a spiritual being, one who assures us of God’s presence as we read in Jeremiah in the First Reading of the 12th Sunday “The Lord is at my side, a mighty hero,” The Saints and especially Mary stand with us on His behalf too. This assurance in Faith is something that sustains and gives Hope, especially to those who suffer injustice: I am thinking of victims of the Windrush scandal as I write this Reflection. The West Indian people are a people of deep Faith in Jesus Risen and their coming to new life in Him. Despite the injustice the Windrush Generation experienced, they remain a people of Joy and Faith. I am particularly pleased (as Founder of the West Indian Chaplaincy in 1974) to hear that the Chaplaincy is organising a Celebration of the Windrush Generation in July: music, song and poetry will be dominant in their evening in July at St Francis, Handsworth. Our Lady of the Caribbean is their own special Angel!

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