



Fourth Sunday of the Year and the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord – 28<sup>th</sup> January & 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

***“He gives orders even to the unclean spirits and they obey Him”*** (Mark 1)

Recently I was reminded of a wonderful true story in a series of ‘1 minute stories’ on the internet. This was headed ‘A story about value and character’. You may recall it: Kenyan runner Abel Mutai was only a few meters from the finishing line but he got confused with the sign and stopped, thinking he had finished the race. A Spanish man, Ivan Fernandez, was behind him and realising what was going on started shouting to the Kenyan to keep running. Mutai didn’t understand Spanish. Realising what was going on Fernandez pushed Mutai to victory. A reporter asked Ivan: *“Why did you do this?”* Ivan replied: *“My dream is that one day we can have some sort of community life where we push ourselves and each other to win.”*

How different was the news hitting the headlines this last week where it was reported in football this time that the FIFA boss Gianni Infantino has called for the implementation of an automatic forfeit of games for teams whose fans commit racial abuse after the *“abhorrent”* incidents at Udinese and Sheffield Wednesday. In the first AC Milan’s players walked off the pitch after the French goalkeeper Mike Maignon reported hearing monkey noises coming from the crowd at the Stadio Friuli. Coventry’s Kasey Palmer said he received similar abuse at Hillsborough and the match stopped for several minutes. The FIFA boss said: *“The events that took place in Udinese and Sheffield are totally abhorrent and completely unacceptable.”*

This weekend the Bishops of England and Wales asks us to observe Racial Justice Sunday 2024 with the theme *“Seeing One Another in the Life of the Church.”* They give this quotation from 1 Peter 3:8 to inspire our reflections: *“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”* They say *“As Catholics, we believe in the common humanity of every person and the importance of fraternity in overcoming differences. This year, in the face of turbulent and often divisive global events, it is more important than ever to see one another, in all our similarity and diversity, in the life of the Church.”* They present Saints of colour from different parts of the world to enrich our prayer and ask *“What lesson(s) can be taken from their story and applied to our everyday life.”* The reality of everyday life in terms of racism is most evident in the Football stories of this weekend. It is shocking to see the fact that such *“unclean spirits”* spoken of in the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday are still with us. Could we take a lead as Church people in promoting a greater appreciation of people of different

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colour and culture? On the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord this week we hear the beautiful prayer of Simeon as he beheld the Child Jesus in the Temple:

*“Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel.”*

The upcoming Annual Intercultural Mass is a positive way of “*growing*” a deeper appreciation of the spiritual riches that different peoples bring to the life of the Church. In our Reflection for Racial Justice Sunday we have a further opportunity to examine our conscience in relation to people of colour and be inspired by the story of Ivan Fernandez and Abel Mutai from 2013 as well as by the Saints presented to us by the Bishops: St Augustine of Hippo, St Augustine Zhao Rong, St Charbel, Saint Kizito, Saint Josephine Bakhita, Saint Bowman, and others – not least Bl. Cyprian Tansi a Cistercian from Nigeria who lived the last part of his life at Mount St Bernard Abbey near Coalville Leicestershire. His Feast is marked there on 20 January each year.

Finally, my attention has been drawn to a group of people who are often marginalised in the Church as well as by the wider community: the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities. The Bishops of England and Wales are seeking to appoint a National Chaplain for them. What is our attitude and how would the Lord Jesus respond to this community in these days?

In the weekly Burning Bush vlog for this weekend we have taken the Responsorial Psalm of the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday for the Scripture Reading:

“O that you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts.” (Psalm 94)

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