



30th Week of Ordinary Time and World Mission Day: 23rd/24th October

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“God be merciful to me, a sinner”

I was struck this week by an account of Pope Francis’ Catechesis at his Public Audience, 12th October, on “spiritual discernment”. He had already spoken of the importance of self-knowledge and prayer in this process, and last week he spoke of “desire” as an essential ingredient too. It was his definition of desire that was most interesting. He went back to the Latin term “desidus”, literally “the lack of the star”. He went on it is “the lack of a reference point that orients the path of life...it evokes a suffering, a lack, and at the same time a tension to reach the good that is missing.” He had begun his Catechesis some time ago on “discernment” which he described as “an exercise of intelligence, and also of skill and also of will, to seize the opportune moment” in order to make a good choice about one’s life.

“Desire, then,” he said in the livestream audience on Wednesday “is the compass to understand where I am and where I am going. Actually, it is the compass for whether I am standing still or going.” “A sincere desire,” he said (I am quoting the account giving by Hannah Brockhaus for the Catholic News Agency) “knows how to touch deeply the chords of our being, which is why it is not extinguished in the face of difficulties and setbacks.”

That has been my personal experience: having been filled with the desire of bringing Jesus to people as His Priest at the age of 15, the challenges and difficulties along the way have not deflected me from the joy and fulfilment I have found in that vocation. The Pope went on: “unlike a momentary craving or emotion, desire lasts through time, even a long time.” He pointed to some of the pitfalls to knowing the desires of one’s heart; for example, society’s promotion of “the maximum freedom of choice” while those “choices” are mostly reduced to just what is wanted most in the moment, not what will truly satisfy over the long term. “We are bombarded by a thousand proposals, projects, possibilities, which risk distracting us and not permitting us to calmly evaluate what we really want.” ... “Desire cannot grow like that”, he said. “You live in the moment, satiated in the moment, and desire does not grow.” Francis said that distraction can cause people a lot of suffering “because they do not know what they want from their lives; they have probably never got in touch with their deepest desire.” He went on “By engaging in dialogue with the Lord, we learn to understand what we truly want from life” ... “If the Lord were to ask us, today, the question he asked the blind man in Jericho: “What do you want me to do for you?” How would we answer? The Pope said. “Perhaps we could finally ask him to help us know His deepest desire, that God Himself has placed in our heart.”

As I noted earlier in this Reflection, Pope Francis has already spoken of the importance of self-knowledge and prayer in the process of spiritual discernment. It seems to me

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these two come together in the lovely parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the reading from St Luke's Gospel for the 30th Sunday. It is the second Parable on Prayer in Chapter 18 and it addresses "Attitude in Prayer". In contrasting the Prayer of the Pharisee with the Prayer of the Tax Collector, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in humility. Tax Collectors were collaborators with the Roman Authorities in a system that allowed Tax Collectors to line their own pockets by charging in excess of the defined taxes. The Pharisee is full of his own importance, and in the Parable Jesus offers the humility of the Tax Collector as the model for the Prayer of the disciple. The Pharisee reels off his not inconsiderable achievements in his Prayer; the Tax Collector simply says "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

The Parable reminds us that when we pray, we must remember our need for God in our lives. If we are too full of ourselves, there is too little room for God's grace to work in us.

This Parable presents us with a wonderful lesson in discerning our part in the Mission of the Church on World Mission Sunday. Whatever our path in life we can listen again to the words of Our Lord to the Apostles (Acts 1:18) at His Ascension: "You shall be my witnesses".

This past week we have had a choice of memorials at daily Mass: the saints are an inspiration. One I chose was Saint Frideswide, a Saxon Saint who is Patron of Oxford and the University in particular. Her shrine is at Christchurch College, and she is remembered especially at the Church of St Margaret of Antioch, Binsey, (about 1 and a half miles from the center of Oxford) where she built an Oratory. She chose a life of dedication to God over being a Princess! Not everyone is challenged to make such a difficult decision! Through her prayers, may you be blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit to discern and follow your deepest desire in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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