



14th Week of Ordinary Time 3/4th July
Reflection/Homily by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Christ our Peace: Fear, Pain and Death will not have the last word.”

This week we have heard on the media the news of the death of Dame Deborah James: a young woman who has fought cancer in the full light of the media; refusing to let it have the last word in her life; keeping active til the last moment; raising money to fund research; and advising others on how to be aware of the possible onset of such disease. At the end it was in the arms of her family that she passed away. Would that we could all be so courageous and instead of being downcast in the midst of decline remain people of hope, passing on that mindset to others.

It was made public this week that the next Jubilee Year in the Church, 2025, has been given the title “Pilgrims of Hope” by Pope Francis. I noted that this was a central theme in his Easter Vigil Homily as he reflected on the Resurrection and God’s plan of peace for the world even as we are afraid and terrified, by the reality of war, to despair. Speaking of the women who were the first witness of the Risen Lord, he said, “On this night brothers and sisters, let us allow the women of the Gospel to lead us by the hand, so that, with them, we may glimpse the first rays of the dawn of God’s life rising in the darkness of our world”.

As we continue to walk with Jesus on His Journey to Jerusalem– where he was to die and rise again – in this Sunday’s Gospel, it is to be noted that Jesus wanted His message to be carried to the ends of the earth as he sent out 72 others (this number represented all the nations of the world). The first word of that message was to be “peace” as it was the first word of Jesus when he appeared to the Disciples after His Resurrection. The urgency of this Mission comes across in this Sunday’s Gospel, as they are told not to spend time gathering up their belongings. And, the closing words “The Kingdom of God is very near to you.”

“Peace” is brought about through union with God and His Salvation, especially in Christ, who delivers us from suffering and evil. The Kingdom of God is His Kingdom, His reign in our lives now, and fulfilled in the life to come.

This Sunday I have been commissioned to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for two young people: it is the Sacrament normally conferred by the Bishop, but in the time of COVID delegated to Priests in certain circumstances. In this case it will take place for two families I know in St Francis of Assisi, Baddesley Clinton. Confirmation has this dimension of “sending out” so it falls very helpfully on the Sunday when the Gospel is about the sending out of 72 disciples. It is very daunting: Jesus Himself says He is sending the 72 out and they will be like “lambs among wolves”. I like the word used by Pope Francis recently “Apprenticeship”: it takes time for our thinking and acting to be aligned to that of Our Lord. These young people are at the beginning of their Mission to

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take the Peace of Christ to the world: the Peace that is the hallmark of His Kingdom, the Peace that reigns in our hearts in the midst of Fear, Pain and Death.

I like to think of the Scriptures as the inspired guidelines for our life journey: as we experience the joys and sorrows of life, both personal and social, we look to them – to God’s Word – to guide us. As we look to the Scriptures for the 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time we have so much to draw on: each reading has a special message for us.

I like particularly the words of St Paul in the letter to the Galatians as I reflect on Dame Deborah James and the Cross that so many experience in cancer today, though they can be applied to any illness of course, as well as to witnessing to Jesus in our lives more generally. Paul says that what matters is that we “become an altogether new creature”. He rejoices in his own sufferings and scars by which he shares in the Cross of Jesus. He sees them as the “brandmarks” of Christ: the Cross “is the instrument by which Christ makes all things new” says Fr Ferlita in his reflection on the Gospel.

In conclusion I think it is good to observe that Jesus sends the 72 disciples out in pairs: they are not to be alone. Not only is that wise in terms of safety, but also we gain so much support in being with others and sharing with them. The Church calls us to the Eucharist, to be nurtured by the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Lord, and also to be aware that in going out to witness to live the Gospel, we are all “Apprentices”, we can all learn from each other in this challenging Mission. We can learn too from the great witnesses from the past: I write this Reflection on the Feast of the First Martyrs of the Church in Rome (30th June); at the end of the coming week we remember the Chinese Martyrs (9th July). We ask for their prayers as we strive to be witnesses today, and we pray for those who are on the front line of being witnesses, whether it is coping with their own personal Cross, like Dame Deborah James, or as witnesses to the Way of Christ as the Church in the world today.

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