



Pentecost Sunday: 5th June 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The Power of the Word”

I am preparing this Reflection on the Feast of the Visitation of Our Lady 31st May. I have always welcomed this Feast which brings to a close the month of Our Lady. Today I am reminded of the power of Mary’s words: Elizabeth rejoices at her visitation saying “the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy.”

At Pentecost we reflect on the Power of the Word given to the Apostles: in the Gospel of St John it is especially a Word of Peace and Forgiveness that Jesus speaks and the power of communication of God’s salvation to the world.

In the Acts of the Apostles the preaching of the Apostles unites people of different races and languages. Elsewhere in St John (Chapter 6:63) we hear that the words of Jesus, which are the revelation of God’s being, are spirit and life.

As we consider the word of God proclaimed in the Church we see it addresses the needs of different times and places and impacts so powerfully. Most recently we saw this in the Apostolic Visit of Pope Francis to Iraq where he brought together different Denominations and Faiths in the context of the teachings in Fratelli Tutti: all under God the Father are brothers and sisters. The outcome, as on the Day of Pentecost, was a world united with Pope Francis around God’s Word. Listening to the issues facing Lebanon in these days it is heartening to hear the Bishops of that region in the East see the role of the Church as one that keeps their fragile society together at this time.

In the third edition of Roman Missal I noted the Vigil Mass of Pentecost includes provision of an Extended Form which includes Vespers and Readings from Scripture: the first reading is from the Book of Genesis Chapter 11, the story of the Tower of Babel, which sounds like the Hebrew word balal meaning “to confuse”. In that story the tower in building by the proud citizens to reach heaven is left unfinished and the language of the people is now confused (with many different languages) by God because of their pride. Pentecost turns all this around: the Apostles filled with the Holy Spirit speak in many languages showing how the Church, united in the Spirit, will speak one language of every people. The word Babel (from which we get Babylonia) in fact has its own meaning “the gate of God”. Fr Ferlita in his commentary writes: “whereas at Babel presumption is punished, on Pentecost our hopes are rewarded. The Holy Spirit descends on us through Christ, the Gate of God, and through him we ascend to God.”

We experience this especially in Sacraments: recently I had a couple text me after the Baptism of their child “we are reflecting on the lovely day we had last Sunday and wanted to say thank you again.” I had texted that the little one through the power of Jesus’ words had become “a Child of God”. A young couple on their marriage day had

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Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



written, “thank you for all your help and guidance you have given us whilst preparing for our big day. It was perfect.” The parents (non-Catholic) had said “how much they felt part the ceremony...it wasn’t alien at all.” God’s word has the power to cut through seemingly alien environments to speak to the heart of people giving them peace and joy.

Just today I saw pictures posted from the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in France: a wonderful Centre where the sick and disabled are the heart of Pilgrimage: where so many find the healing touch, the power of God’s Word speaking to them and expressing the value Jesus places on all those who are sick and bear the Cross.

Yes the “Power of God’s Word” in the Spirit reaches out to all creating in society a culture of care for everyone, not only those who know God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Only yesterday we celebrated the Feast of Pope St Paul VI who is popularly known for his Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* which was controversial in terms of Marriage and Birth Control, but that was not all he had to say. One of his most famous Encyclicals was *Populorum Progressio* where he wrote: “The progressive development of peoples is an object of deep interest and concern to the Church. This is particularly true in the case of those peoples who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance; of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth.”

The people of the Church inspired by the Word of God play a large part in reaching out to the most vulnerable, the poorest in society. You will know them not just by what they say but what they do!

“Send forth your Spirit O Lord and renew the face of the earth”.

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