



The Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday 6 August 2023

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Death is only an Horizon”

*“Lord, we give our loved one back to you,
and just as you first gave her to us
and did not lose her in the giving,
so we have not lost her
in returning her to you.
For life is eternal
Love is immortal,
death is only an horizon,
and an horizon is nothing
but the limit of our earthly sight.
We hold her close within our hearts,
and there she shall remain,
to work with us throughout our lives
until we meet again.”*

(Jubilee Prayer Book, Salthill Parish)

As I write this Reflection for the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, my mind has turned to the Requiem I will celebrate on Friday this week for my first cousin, Margaret Lohan, who has passed away after a battle with cancer. Her husband John and family will be devastated by her loss. I will recall her goodness, her love and her joy, her sense of humour and her Faith as she carried the cross of cancer. Depending on the readings from Scripture the family choose I will be able to illustrate Christian Hope in the light of Christ’s life, the Cross and the Resurrection. I will conclude with this prayer found in the Prayer Book in Salthill Parish, Co. Galway: *“Death is only a Horizon”*.

World Youth Day began yesterday, Tuesday 1 August, in Lisbon Portugal. Hundreds of thousands of young people from all over the world are gathering in joy to celebrate their Faith. Prominent among the symbols I noted yesterday evening was a huge cross: it is part of life for all, and those who suffer serious illness know what it means to live in its shadow. On the Feast of the Transfiguration we are invited to consider the joy of life in the Kingdom of God. Peter, James and John don’t want to leave the mountain where they

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



enter into glory. Peter says in the second reading: *“we had seen his majesty for ourselves”*.

The Apostles, we are told in the Gospel, didn't understand what *“rising from the dead”* could mean. Until they witnessed Jesus' Passion and Death, they could not possibly understand. The author of Sunday Connection writes: *“We however have the benefit of hindsight. In our hearing of the Transfiguration Gospel, we see an anticipation of Jesus' Resurrection, a foreshadowing of Christ's glory in Heaven, and the promise of our own Resurrection.”* Father Joseph Pollard in a Homily on the occasion of the death of someone after a long illness writes: *“If suffering needs faith to carry it so does the loss of a loved one need faith to transform it”*. He quotes Rabbi David Wolpe in *“Making Loss Matter”* who writes *“Faith is our chance to make sense of loss”*. And he goes on to quote Dr Kathleen Dowling Singh, a specialist in hospice care, who says that *“the deepest reason we are afraid of death is that we do not know who we are.”* (The Grace in Dying). We do not know who we are because we spend our lives trying to be someone or something we are not called to be. We do not know who we are because we do not accept our finiteness, and the truth that our death is part of our lives.... Christ has given us our true meaning and identity. He tells us who we are. He makes meaning of our loss, and tells us how pain may be transformed and we through it, and death the passage to another plane.

Jesus said to those who love and trust Him: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's House there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”* (John 14:1-3)

We will meet again in God's place where there is no more pain and no more tears. We will meet again where life and love and joy and bliss are endless, where yesteryears of suffering, and our loss of today, are transformed by Resurrection and enveloped in glory.

Another prominent symbol present at the first World Youth Gathering was a beautiful statue of Mary, Mother of the Church. She was there with Jesus on the Cross; she is with us too on our Faith Journey. Pope Francis went to pray before her image in Mary Major Basilica in Rome on Monday this week before leaving for his apostolic journey to Portugal; he will also visit Mary's Shrine in Fatima. I will go the Shrine of Mary at Knock in Ireland where Mary stood (with the people at a time of poverty and need in 1879), before the Funeral of my cousin. Mary is with the young people gathering for World Youth Day, as they commit to take the good news of the Joy of Life in the Risen Christ to the world of today.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese