



Second Week of Advent (Year C): 5th/6th December
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Behold the joy that comes to you from God.”

This week I saw a short excerpt on T.V. of a 12-point giant star being hoisted to the top of a new tower of the iconic Sagrada Familia Basilica (The Holy Family Basilica, Barcelona). It will be lit up in time for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady on 8th December this coming week. Made of glass and steel, it will be known as the ‘Bethlehem Star’ and will be atop the new Tower of the Virgin Mary. We are invited to take part in the lighting up of the Star in the coming days via the internet. The Architect, Gaudi, began this world famous Basilica many years ago and, though he has died, it is not yet finished. His desire was that it would be a Bible in Stone!

To me the Star points to the one that Baruch points to in the Communion Antiphon for the Second Sunday of Advent, where the Prophet says: “Jerusalem, arise and stand upon the heights, and behold the joy which comes to you from God”. The Star hovered over the place where Jesus was born; and the journey began with His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Visitors to Barcelona, from near and far, go to see the Sagrada Familia: this year they will see the Tower lit in shades of white and blue symbolizing the cloak of the Virgin Mary. I foresee parents explaining to their children the meaning of it all, and how it culminates in the Birth of the Saviour, Jesus, on Christmas Day.

Truly the cause of all our festivities at Christmas in the Birth of Jesus the Light of the World. As well as enjoying nice food and drink we all try to find our own ways of highlighting what this Feast means lest it gets lost in the middle of partying, which, in the long run, is not as satisfying as reaching out to Jesus who brought us the meaning of life and the goal of our journey on earth.

Earlier today, as I was thinking about my Reflection for the Second Week of Advent, a carpenter friend came to my home to repair the curtain rail that came down this past week. He is retired, but still doing some part-time work and taking up a couple of hobbies: one is making cribs for the different grown up children in his family; something they are asking him to do, so that the crib, showing the child Jesus with Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, can be a feature in their home for Christmas. I said you are doing a wonderful work of “evangelization”. It would be great if we could all find ways of our own to recall and celebrate the meaning of Christmas and how it impacts on our lives.

Just yesterday I was helping with the Confessions, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in St Augustine’s Church, Solihull. Father Dominic, the Parish Priest, and Father Joseph, a retired Priest living in the Presbytery, were hearing the Confessions of the Children from the Primary School. I was doing the same for their parents. I thought the parents were a

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great example to their children, publically witnessing to their need of Forgiveness of Sin too. Also, it was a special way of giving witness to preparing for the Birth of the Saviour. John the Baptist calls the people to “prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight” in the Gospel for the Second Sunday. The Church has always seen Confession, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as a way of turning away from sins, our selfishness, to open our hearts to the coming of Jesus at Christmas. With the Confession goes Penance, an act of love as a sign of turning from self and back to God.

We don't get true lasting happiness in simply carousing, though we enjoy our turkey and Christmas pudding, of course!! I was reading an article by Paul Bloom a Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto the other day: he was confronting the argument that human beings just seek pleasure, that we are all hedonists! He says “the drive for meaning is every bit as important as the drive to have a good time.” He quotes the Psychiatrist Frankl in his book “Man's Search for Meaning” where he writes “Those who had the best chance of survival were those whose lives had broader purpose, who had some goal or project or relationship, some reason to live.”

That is what Jesus gives us in his life and teaching. He is the fulfilment of Prophet Baruch in the first reading on the Second Sunday of Advent “God will guide Israel in joy by the light of His glory with His mercy and integrity for escort.” Jesus gives meaning to life.

The Star on the Basilica in Barcelona, and the Star I hang on my front door and the crib made by my carpenter friend in Advent points to Him. We can all find ways to pass on those words “Behold the joy that comes to you from God.”

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