



14th Week in Ordinary Time 7 July 2024
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“He was amazed at their lack of faith” (Mark 6:6)

I started to put words to paper for this Reflection on the Feast of St Thomas, the Apostle. It was pleasing at Mass to be able to say some words after the Gospel about the inspiration St Thomas has been to all of us who seek to witness to our Faith in Jesus. He questioned the Resurrection and refused to believe until he saw Jesus for himself: then he was strengthened to go out to proclaim Jesus as Saviour, and to pass on the ‘Way’ Jesus taught. I was able to speak about the Faith and Witness of the Syro-Malabar Community from Kerala in India, who look back to St Thomas as their Apostolic Foundation. There are many of this Catholic Community now living among us and strengthening our Witness to Our Lord in many places in our Archdiocese. Like us, they bring their cultural background to the society which we are all a part in England. No doubt, they are experiencing the reality of the words about Jesus in the Gospel for the 14th Sunday of the year: *“He was amazed at their Lack of Faith”*. The Feast of St Thomas is a special day for them. Sunday Connection from Loyola Press has this in its Commentary on the Gospel passage for the 14th Sunday: *“This passage unfolds a continuing theme of Mark’s Gospel: Who is Jesus? His kinsfolk in Nazareth know the Carpenter, the Son of Mary, but they do not know Jesus, the Son of God. Mark is foreshadowing Jesus’ rejection by his own people, the people of Israel. He is also reflecting on and trying to explain the situation of the community for which he wrote. While many of the first Christians were Jewish, Christianity took hold and flourished in the Gentile Community. Mark’s community was mostly a Gentile Community who may have been experiencing persecution. By showing that Jesus Himself was rejected, Mark consoles and reassures his first readers. He also prepares us to accept this possible consequence of Christian discipleship.”*

One of the biggest challenges we face as Catholics who attend Sunday Mass and seek to pass on our Faith in Jesus as the one who guides our way of life is how can we reach out to others with all he means to us, even those of our own family. All we can do is: be consistent in our love of Our Lord, deepen our relationship to Him, and be ready to speak of who He is for us and witness to it by our actions. Then we have to leave it to the people we strive to reach with the good news of the Gospel to respond.

Some years ago I was in Washington in the United States as the guest of the Archbishop; his Secretary was Fr William Lori, the present Archbishop of Baltimore. Sometimes I read his articles in ‘Catholic Review’, the Newsletter of the Archdiocese. This week he

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addressed the matter of Witness to Our Lord, Faith in God: He speaks of how he has dealt with this in the context of a chance encounter at the Airport:

"It's all very nice", someone said to me as I waited for a flight, "all this talk about God and his love. But is it real? Isn't it just a lot of nice ideas?"

Well, my airport interlocutor at least gave me something to work with. She allowed that talk about God and faith is "very nice" – not everyone thinks so. But she also wondered if "God talk" refers to something or to someone real.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit, something Pope Francis often says popped into my mind: "Realities are greater than ideas." It's not that the Holy Father disrespects ideas, especially good ideas. But what he wants us to focus on are the realities to which good ideas point and which they describe.

So, I said to my partner in conversation, "If you think the faith is just about ideas, I don't blame you for not being interested. After all, the world is drowning in ideas – good, bad and indifferent."

"Go on," she said inquisitively. I was only too happy to do so.

"Life has become a battleground of ideas, and a lot of people are trying hard to get us to accept their ideas. Some peddle ideologies, a way of looking at life that claims to explain it all – but it never succeeds. If I thought that I were in the idea business," I added, "I'd move on and try to do something useful."

She looked me in the eye and said, "How do you know it's real?" I could have offered her a philosophical proof for God's existence and other arguments that point to God's reality. Instead, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I answered simply, "I meet Jesus at Mass, in Holy Communion. Here is where I experience his love for real."

I thought I had lost her. But she persisted: "You really believe that, don't you?"

"I do," I said. "I've staked my life on it. The Lord didn't just leave us with ideas or a formula or a sales pitch. Jesus promised to remain with us until the end of time and the Eucharist is the main way he keeps his promise. He is truly present. The bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Sharing in the Eucharist, we share in Jesus' gift of self on the Cross."

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She thanked me for being willing to talk with her as we boarded the aircraft. I didn't see her again but have often wondered if I had helped her on her faith journey. I hope so. I pray so.

Most people don't have the opportunity of attending daily Mass, as Bishops and priests do, but the Sunday Mass is at the centre of our week. Archbishop Lori is speaking in the context of a National Eucharistic Congress in the United States, and he concludes his article thus:

"My hope and prayer is that many in the archdiocese will rediscover and recover their eucharistic faith and that those who have remained close to the eucharistic Lord will encourage family members, friends and colleagues to return to Mass, there to encounter the Risen Lord, whose love is stronger than sin and more powerful than death."

There are other opportunities open to us to witness to our Faith, and one is highlighted for us with the Holy Father's Intention for the Worldwide Prayer Network in July (a monthly Intention published in time for the First Friday of the month). The Intention is 'for the pastoral care of the sick': *"We pray that the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick confer on those who receive it and their loved ones the power of the Lord and become ever more a visible sign of compassion and help for all."* When I give the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick I try to arrange it – in the case of those near death – with family and close friends near the sick bed and with candles lit. In a video released on 2 July Pope Francis asks Catholics to pray for the pastoral care of the sick in July; he highlights that the Anointing is a *"visible sign of compassion and hope."* He said, *"let us pray that the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick grant the Lord's strength to those who receive it and their loved ones."* The Pope refers to this Sacrament being a visible sign of compassion and hope, and "Hope" is the central theme of the Jubilee Year beginning soon. It is I think a theme that speaks to all in a troubling world. Even those who have "no faith" or are closed to it, may be ready to listen to what our Faith says about the future of humanity.

On the Feast of St Thomas the Prayer after Communion had these words:

"O God, we truly receive this Sacrament the Body of your only begotten Son, grant, we pray, that we may recognise Him with the Apostle Thomas by faith as Our Lord and our God and proclaim him by our deeds and our life." Amen.

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