



First Week of Lent: 6th/7th March 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“My God in whom I trust” (from the Responsorial Psalm)

As I write this Reflection for the First Week of Lent, I recall one week ago when Russia declared war on Ukraine. It seems a lifetime ago as so much has happened, and this event is not somewhere so far away that we don't feel involved: it is taking place in Europe of which we are a part.

There are many different dimensions to this conflict: one of the most moving is the impact the war is having on families. We see many mothers and children leaving home for safety in another country and many fathers joining the resistance; at the same time, we see so many families going underground for safety from bombs and missile attacks. Because of vast media coverage we know of the terrible decisions families are having to make, especially in having to separate not knowing when they will get back together again.

We are in admiration at the love people have for freedom and the type of future they want to safeguard for their children and society in general. They are ready to die rather than lose an open and democratic world, where they see their children will flourish. They can't assume anymore that their values, hopes and dreams will be there – unless they sacrifice for that. They have to make a choice.

That is where we are as a Church at the beginning of Lent, which is time for stepping back and reviewing our priorities: what really matters to us and our families?

Last week on the Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time we were led to reflect through a number of parables in the Gospel on the importance of continued learning, prayer and reflection and humility in our discipleship. You will remember the words of Jesus: “why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own.” A publication “Sunday Connection” suggests that families could gather (parents and children) to talk about “how we might be tempted to focus on one another's shortcomings without noticing our own, and how this might lead to conflict.” It continues: “point out that part of being a good disciple is focusing on our own behavior. As a family, share ideas for responding as a disciple when you are upset with another family member's words or actions (for example, taking a cooling off break before talking to the other person or praying for help to see if your actions contributed to the conflict and you need to apologise). Pray that you will grow together in discipleship and then pray the Lord's prayer.”

My mind went back to last Sunday's Gospel Luke 6 as I reflected on the reading from Luke 4 for the First Sunday of Lent. One commentator (a priest working in the U.S.) speaks of Lent as “taking time out” as happens in American Football (they stop and talk

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



tactics and come back refreshed I believe!) In the Gospel we see Jesus taking “time out”; he spends time with His Father, and examines His priorities. He came out of the desert and gave His life for all of us, not for Himself. I thought on Ash Wednesday, He chose the Cross and new life, over the ashes of selfishness, as that symbolic act of receiving the blessed ash in the form of a cross signifies.

Archbishop Schevchuk, leader of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, speaking in Lviv, said “At this tragic moment, the fate of the Ukrainian people depends on our ability to ‘self organise’ and act responsibly...taking responsibility for the future of the nation.” The people of Ukraine teach us so much as we reflect on them leaving their belongings behind to travel to safety with their children. How much do we need as we gather more and more possessions? Lent is a time to take “time out” to reflect. We too are challenged to decide on our priorities as Church and “take responsibility” for the future of our life of Faith and handing it on to our children, the future generations.

Elsewhere Archbishop Schevchuk said “we will conquer with the power of love for our homeland, for God and our neighbor”. And, he went on to say “let us pray for our enemies...we see that not hatred, but love, conquers. Love gives birth to heroes, but hatred to criminals...one who hates the enemy is already overcome by him.”

It is “my God in whom I trust” that should be the focus of our reflection and prayer this Lent.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese