



19th Week of Ordinary Time: 7th/8th August
Reflection/Homily by Mgr Daniel McHugh

Our Soul is waiting for the Lord

This past week the Penitential Pilgrimage of Pope Francis to the indigenous peoples of Canada made a big impact in the media, mainly for his apology for the Church becoming part of / having “collaborated in the forced assimilation and decracination policies of the governments of the time.” This was what lay behind the “residential school” system which resulted in children being taken away from their families in order to change their culture, mentality, language, and traditions – it has been called a “cultural genocide”.

I suppose it is natural that the media focused mainly on the fact that the Church ran many of those schools, and of course on the Pope’s comments on the way home on the aircraft about the possibility of his resignation if his health declined yet further.

The central thrust of the Pope’s visit was summed up in the motto for the Apostolic Visit “Walking Together” which the Pope said signified “the path of reconciliation and healing, which presupposes historical knowledge, listening to survivors, awareness and above all conversion, a change in mentality” in the Church.

At the General Audience in the Paul VI Hall on 3rd August Pope Francis said: “while there were some men and women in the Church who were “decisive and courageous supporters of the dignity of the indigenous peoples...sadly, there was no shortage of those who participated in programs that today we understand are unacceptable and contrary to the Gospel.” His visit “was therefore a penitential pilgrimage. There were many joyful moments, but the overall meaning and tone was one of reflection, repentance and reconciliation” the Pope said.

He went on “Accompanied by the sound of drums, we left space for silence and prayer so that from memory a new path can begin, with no more ruler and subjects only brothers and sisters.”

The Pope affirmed the Catholic Church’s commitment to promoting “appropriate spiritual paths” while respecting the customs and languages of indigenous peoples.”

I felt the thrust of the Holy Father’s visit reflected to an extent the Pastoral work I am now engaged in: supporting the different ethnic communities in their Chaplaincies, Eparchies and Missions where their Faith Journey is nurtured with use of their own language, customs and Rites.

At the same time I am aware that the Scripture Readings today, particularly the Gospel, are a call to all of us to “watchfulness” in our Faith Life: it is so easy in our own time, and in our own lives to become part of a way of life that is contrary to the Gospel, if we do

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not stand back to listen to the Master's Word, if we do not remain watchful, living in a consistently attentive way to His voice.

When you consider the parables in the Gospel for the 19th Sunday of the Year and ask yourself who is the "faithful steward" the Master has given responsibility to for His household, the Church, you know first of all what a privilege you have been given in your lives by the Master. He trusts in us to play our part in the Mission of the Church. We can truly make the response to the Psalm for the 19th Sunday our own "Happy are the people the Lord has chosen as His own." At the same time, the Psalm expresses so well the trust we can have in the one who has entrusted so much to us in our homes, families, work and social life:

*"Our Soul is waiting for the Lord.
The Lord is our help and our shield.
May your love be upon us, O Lord,
as we place all our hope in you."*

The Master is always faithful even when we are unfaithful. The Holy Father's Penitential Pilgrimage to Canada is a model for us all. It was made over a period of days and in some pain; it is a beginning though of what the Church must go through to come to peace and reconciliation. We are all called to a penitential dimension of our own Faith Journey so that we can be at peace too. We are all "Walking Together", "Our soul is waiting for the Lord".

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