



The Ascension of the Lord 9 May: Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Soon and very soon we are going to see the King” (Andraé Crouch, Gospel Music)

In his obituary for Father David Standley, a member of my Roman “Year” who started in Rome in 1961 and left in 1968, Eamon Duffy, emeritus professor of the history of Christianity at Cambridge University, writes of David taking the microphone to lead “Soon and very soon we are going to see the king”. It was one of the last events David attended, and it was a celebration of his 88th Birthday arranged by the L’Arche community. The last time I met David was at our “Year Reunion” in Solihull in October 2023. As “convenor” of our periodic gatherings, I had asked him to contribute the Reflection at Mass; it was thoughtful and creative as always. Though David had Cancer going back to 2018, he continued to come to our gatherings and though he had “retired” at 75 from parish work, he remained active in priestly ministry. He found he had more time for the L’Arche Community which is centred round a network of relationships open to all its members with or without intellectual disability. He continued to play a part in the Jesus Caritas Fraternity inspired by the Spirituality of Saint Charles de Foucauld. And, he gave Retreats. David took with him into his “retirement” years of active involvement with prisons; devotion to the cause of “peace” (he was once arrested for daubing the walls of the Ministry of Defence with a Cross of Ashes on Ash Wednesday); and a commitment to Ecumenism.

Eamon Duffy writes in Fr David’s Obituary: “Though his illness progressed more rapidly than he had hoped for ... he embraced the process without fear, even with curiosity: to one visitor he said: “I wonder what God is saying to me through this cancer: I wouldn’t want to miss it” ... He now found that prayer, and faith, though no easier, had become simpler. He’d stopped worrying, he said, about the big questions, increasingly resting in the one conviction that love was at the heart of the mystery of God, and of our human existence. Love was in charge, so all would be well.” Duffy concludes: “in his affection for those who cared for or came to see him, in his desire to live every stage of what he called “the last stretch home”, he gave us the final gift of his priesthood. He showed us how to die.”

I have begun to write this Reflection for the Ascension of the Lord on the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, 1 May. I find I am conscious of the need to discern what God is calling us to, even when we have reached the age of retiring from paid work. That was something Father David achieved so well in taking forward his work of love in latter years: you don’t have to be a priest to play a vital part in building the Kingdom of God. How many fathers and mothers of families continue to support and nurture family life; how many volunteers in parish life come from among the more elderly supporting and

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nurturing the life of the community of the Church, and more widely among those in need. To mark the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, I turned to the Reflection of Pope St

John XXIII on the image of St Joseph, attentive to each member of the faithful in all places we work: in our homes, jobs, society etc. The saintly Pope wrote: *“our heart loves to imagine the serene marriage of the Guardian of Jesus and the most Pure Spouse of the Blessed Virgin paternally bending over the labours and sorrows of each one, to bless, encourage, support and comfort”* ... Pope St John continued *“Beloved sons and daughters, look confidently ahead on the paths that are open to you on your journey: the Church is counting on you ...”* He quotes St Paul’s letter to the Colossians, read at Mass on the Feast of St Joseph the Worker: *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Jesus”* (Col 3:17, 23-24).

Father David Standley’s Requiem Mass Booklet included a poem “The Bright Field” by R.S. Thomas; it concludes: “Life is not hurrying to a receding future, or hankering after an imagined past. It is the turning aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush, to a brightness that seemed as transitory as your youth once, but is the eternity that awaits you.”

The Solemnity of the Ascension celebrates the completion of the work of the Lord Jesus. Where he has gone we hope to follow. For those near death, the lyrics of Andraé Crouch take us to his side:

“Soon, and very soon we are going to see the king”

*Should there be any rivers we must cross
Should there be any mountains we must climb
God will supply all the strength that we need
Give us strength till we reach the other side.*

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