



Acies Allocutio



Presentata Curia
Sunday 29th March 2009

My dear fellow Legionaries,

We are faced today with a daunting challenge. Around us both the Church of God and our society appear to be falling into ruins. In some parishes less than 10% of people attend Mass. Our society seems to be coming under the control of criminals both at higher levels and lower levels. Family and married life is seriously undermined. Many of our young people, our future, seem to have forgotten God for pleasures, perhaps have never even heard of him. The way of life many of them follow often only leaves them in serious difficulties later on as the effects of drugs, drink, unhealthy use of their sexuality and other excesses ruin their lives. I'll stop there. You get enough bad news daily without me reminding you of it and anyway the reality is so plain to see.

The question is what are we going to do about it? We might even ask ourselves honestly: do we really, really care? How convicted am I about God, about the Gospel, about the Church and its mission? Because here is another reality: many people are cynical or unconvinced about religion. They see levels of immaturity and hypocrisy in many so called religious people at times, they see how some use religion for economic or political gain, they cannot reconcile how some people in the name of God kill and maim. And yet there is another reality. They admire the truly religious people who seem sincere: Francis of Assisi, Vincent de Paul, and Mother Teresa. In other words many souls looking out for a light are affected by people who have a harmony between what they claim to profess and the way they actually live. And that tells us how we can make a difference, each of us as these people show. Yes, we can!

Last year I watched with great interest the American election. It was perhaps one of the most fascinating battles for years. Why did Barrack Obama win? As in all these things there were many factors. But later I read his work on *Audacity to Hope*. I felt I should get to know this guy and I noticed a few things. He does come across as sincere and authentic. And if so let it remind us that it is the genuine, the sincere and the authentic that will make the impression. That is a hallmark of anyone who is going to make an influence. For instance Mr. Obama admits he doesn't have all the answers. And one thing that gives me some hope is that he admits his thinking on abortion may be wrong. So keep praying for him.

But he also mentioned a phase a few years ago when he was going to give up because things were not going well. But he decided to try one more time, won a senate seat and the rest is history. I couldn't but think of another leader when I read that. You remember the time Jesus told Peter to let down his nets. And Peter said, "But Lord, I've worked all night and caught nothing. But at your word I will let down the nets." And what a catch he had. And Jesus is saying to us all, as he did to Peter, "Try again. The harvest is ready. You will catch men and women for your heavenly father." Not because we in ourselves can but because he is with us.

Let us listen to something said recently by Peter's successor, Pope Benedict. He quotes St. Peter, "Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (I Pet 3:15). And he adds, "In our days, when in vast areas of the world the faith is in danger of dying out like a flame which no longer has fuel, the overriding priority is to make God present in this world and to show men and women the way to God. Not just any god, but the God who spoke on Sinai; to that God whose face we recognise in a love which presses to the end (John 13:1)—in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. The real problem at this moment of our history is that God is disappearing from the human horizon and, with the



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dimming of the light which comes from God, humanity is losing its bearings, with increasingly evident destructive effects.”

I was struck by that Old Testament text we had the other morning. Let me quote it in part: “Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs down our spirits. He holds aloof from our doings as through from filth.” But here is the question for us: is there anything at all about my life that would cause anyone to think of believing in God or in seeking his ways and following them? You won’t be able to manufacture that. Remember the sequence the Gospel showed us in the calling of the disciples: he called them first to be with him and then to go out and bring the Gospel to others (Mk 3:13ss). We must draw close to God ourselves first; the rest will follow.

You don’t have to be a personality like Mother Teresa or Francis of Assisi to win people to God. Very often it can be the little people, the ordinary neighbour or colleague or family member who can in their circle make the difference. If you love God and desire nothing else than to do his will and seek it with your whole heart God will be with you and you will be making a difference.

It seems to me that that is the mentality and attitude we all need. What is more is that if ever there is going to be people who can try again and can succeed it is us. Why? Because the Lord is with us. And if we have faith in him, if we love him and if it is our desire to do nothing but please him, then he will be with us and make us the instruments of his Kingdom. Like St. Francis we can renew his Church. We can change the course of events. Not because we have the power but because God will not deny the graces needed for those who have faith and who love him.

And that is why we are here. We are all little people in a way, nobodies. And that is why we belong to the company of Mary and her way. She was a nobody from Nazareth. She didn’t seek to be notorious, she kept in the background. She didn’t make herself out as big or important, she simply acknowledged that any good in her or any good she did simply came from God. But she was someone who loved God and wanted to do nothing but please him. At a certain level she remained a nobody in early Christian times. She was not at the forefront of Jesus ministry the way Peter and the other Apostles and disciples were. She gets no mention in the Resurrection appearances unlike the Magdalene or the couple going to Emmaus. St. Paul mentions Peter, James and John; he mentions Barnabbas, Timothy and Titus but seems to allude vaguely to Mary only once when he says about Jesus that he was born of a woman. But without this nobody woman from Nazareth God would not have come on earth, the Church would not have been founded and we might still be awaiting the Saviour. Her life gives us one clear message. It is this: you may be a nobody from nowhere special but if you give yourself totally to God, to do his will as best you can in your life, God will take that offering and use it to change history’s course. If you are here today because of her faith, if you are here today because of the faith of our forefathers that suffered in penal times, then do not doubt but that your faith today will be bearing fruit across many generations still to come.

Mother Teresa whom I already referred to said one time, “God does not ask me to be a success but to be faithful.” But this too is true that only those tested in their faith and who remain faithful are guaranteed to be successful. They are the ones of real use to God, whom God does mighty things through. Such were Abraham, Moses, David and Elijah. And if ever there was one of God’s people who had their faith tested it was Mary. How well John Paul II articulated this when he spoke of her. St. Elizabeth testified that Mary was blessed because of her faith. She kept her union with God alive even at the foot of the Cross. This faith she kept at the foot of the Cross was the same faith with which she received the message of the angel. “How great” says the Pope, “How heroic then is the obedience of faith shown by Mary in the face of God’s unsearchable judgement. How completely she abandons herself to God without reserve offering the full



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assent of the intellect and will to him whose ways are inscrutable” (RM n18). Let us remember that as she saw her only Son die Mary must have felt in some human way that her life’s effort and investment had been a failure. It was a dark moment of her soul because she must also have been tempted by the thought: I have let God down. Yet her love of God and her desire for his will and her deep faith was as intact as ever. In her way she was living those words of Mother Teresa 2000 years later, “God does not ask me to be a success but to be faithful.” She was. And just as Abraham was rewarded for his fidelity to God and became the father of a great nation she too has been rewarded in the millions of sons and daughters who turn to her as their mother in their spiritual needs: truly all generations call her blessed. With Elizabeth we can all say, “Blessed is she who believed”

We are here today to join her. We have come to be people like her, strong in faith. We have come as little and humble people to take our place alongside her as one of those who, by being faithful in our station, open a door to God and for God so that he can come and change the course of history.

We see in her faith and commitment the key that unlocks heaven’s graces. So we ask her to help our faith and to win for us the grace to have a faith that is firm, immovable as a rock, through which we shall rest tranquil and steadfast amid the crosses, toils and disappointments of life, a courageous face that will indeed inspire us to carry out and without hesitation great things for God and for the salvation of souls.

And it is that strong faith that we need to get back in this country at this time, a deep faith in God and his ways, a faith that will bring people through many dark moments. And it is the people of fidelity who will be the instruments of this recovery. Let all of us here today as we pledge our fealty to Mary, and through her to her Son, make that commitment in our hearts, that we will be faithful to the end. Let us stand beside her with that courageous faith that enabled St. John to stand with her at the foot of the Cross and keep on believing through the darkest of moments.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill