



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Heaven

Is there really a heaven? How can we be sure it is no more than an illusion, a false promise? Might it just be despair about our world that makes us humans invent this place just to help us keep going? I ask the question because August is a month in which so many feasts speak of heaven to us: the Transfiguration, Assumption, Queenship of Our Lady, just to name a few.

But our Christian faith is based on the witness of the disciples. They saw with their own eyes, they touched with their own flesh; they encountered the reality of heaven. Not just the Resurrection or the Ascension, but the reality already growing hidden in this life. That is what they were witness to in the Transfiguration on the Mount.

The disciples said, "It is good for us to be here!" And I think that is what we are all hoping for, a place where it will be good for us to be. Why will it be good to be there? Answer: because only good people will be there. The people around us will be watching out for us to see that we are okay because the test for entry, as the parable of the Last Judgement showed, is to have proved you care for the hungry and thirsty, for the lonely and sick and the rejects. The people there will not be spongers who bring nothing themselves and expect to survive off your portion as the parable of the Wise and unwise virgins showed. The people in heaven will be very merciful people because as the parable of the unjust steward shows no unmerciful person will be let in. All doers of evil will have been cast out as the parable of the dragnet tells us. The people of heaven will understand the poor and the meek and bereaved and the pure of heart and those who yearn for justice and the persecuted, as the Beatitudes tell us. And you will not be bad-mouthed because you have faith. Yes, it will be wonderful to be there. Only the friends of God will be in Heaven. It will be a wonderful place of peace and equality and respect. Heaven will provide the best of company!

Yes, it was good for the three apostles to have had a glimpse of heaven. But the disciples were not yet ready to go there. And it is the same for us. Our troubles on life's journey are sent to help us become subjects of God's Kingdom. The trials we endure are sent to help us grow in our charity. We can suffer frustrations and disappointments; we can suffer insecurity and loneliness. But how do we react to these? There is a temptation to take refuge in the pleasures and comforts of the world and of the flesh, even to forgetting others and abusing them in our effort to get consolation. The other option is to listen to God's will and do it in complete trust rather than look for illicit escapes from our trials. For the way of God leads us to a true charity and makes us fitting candidates for heaven; other ways can lead to abuse and mistreatment of others and losing our wedding garment for heaven as another parable mentioned.

Heaven is not an idea; heaven is a very real future which we help carve out with God's grace. If you want to live in a world of the just and good as Jesus pictured it then you have to already work on becoming the kind of person who belongs to that world. There is no point in seeking a world where everyone is positive and friendly and a lover of peace and justice unless you can fit in there too.

The Feast of the Assumption speaks to us of the real call of humanity to Heaven and not just in our spirits but in our bodies too. And from this Heaven the Virgin Mary has sent continual messages to us assuring of its reality. And those who have beheld her have been so taken by her beauty that it is as if they have beheld a part of heaven and desire to be there with her. In these manifestations of her beauty we have a confirmation of those words of St Paul, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard nor the mind imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him." Her message is always positive. We are not to doubt.



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But also not to delay in our response but to deepen our faith and efforts to win the victory that will see us safely there.

She tells us to keep praying, to keep bearing our crosses bravely, and to rejoice in the sacrifices that are held out to us to embrace. And because she as a mother wants all her children there with her she asks brave souls to undertake extra prayers and penances to help souls who are in danger of not making it. That is the sum up of the many apparitions of this Lady in the visitations that are held by the Church as authentic.

Let me turn to the apparition granted us in this country in Knock on August 21st 1879. We see the Lamb of Sacrifice on the altar surrounded by heavenly creatures. He is worshipped too by the Holy Virgin and those saints who were closest to her on earth. I often wondered why it was that St. Joseph and St. John would appear with her. And then a penny dropped. These were the two saints who made a place in their homes for her! Surely there is a lesson there for us all: to make a place in our home for Mary.

Here I must mention the word charity. Do we need to remind ourselves of how often and in how many ways Jesus clearly indicated that Heaven would be for those who rendered the goodness of charity to others? Look even at the vision of Knock and see how it speaks the same to us. Mary is there, she who for the love of humanity permitted God to use her, whose charity is seen in her thoughtfulness for Elizabeth, her concern for the couple at Cana, her solidarity with the Church in its infancy. And let us not underestimate the charity at the foot of the Cross. Or what of St. Joseph who took Mary and her child in? Or what of the Beloved disciple who so beautifully tells us that God is love and he who lives in love lives in God?

Finally may I point out that the great sacrament of charity is the Eucharist. For in it we celebrate the great act of love of God. And I find it so interesting that the vision of Knock contains such a Eucharistic image with the Lamb of God very central. Our Lady is saying to us to deepen our faith and celebration of our Masses and to let this nourishment of charity work in our lives and be truly the bread of Heaven for us. Amen.

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