



Allocutio



Presentata Curia 24th February 2011

Allocutio: Hope

I don't think I need remind anyone about the election which takes place tomorrow. For the past number of weeks, indeed months, the media has bombarded us with updates on political activities. I certainly do not want to add to this. Instead, to take a break from the uncertainty which surrounds the future of our country, I would instead like to say a few words on the hope which our faith has to offer. In a culture caught up with blaming politicians who got things wrong, we should remind ourselves from time to time of the Saints who got things right. Through our baptism, we too, are called to be Saints and our Legion membership reminds us again and again of that calling. I'm not in a position to add much to the insights of our Legion founder Frank Duff on the call to sanctity. Nevertheless, little reminders of our vocation to become Saints are always important, particularly when we live in a society which seems confused and scrambles to find hope.

What makes a person a Saint is the union of vast supernatural love of God, and a nature through which this supernatural love can manifest itself without flaw or discord. The correspondence of nature with grace - which the saints have attained and we are still toiling toward - may, or may not, be a difficult road. The journey is something personal and different for everyone. For some of the Saints, a life of holiness seemed to come naturally to them, while others had to work that bit harder. Nevertheless, what all the Saints have in common is that, through different paths, they all found that ultimate peace which we here on earth are striving for. Peace is not the absence of activity, but the absence of discordancy. Yet, peace may not necessarily be found at the beginning of our life in the Church. Anyone who joins the Church to find an easy life may soon begin to wonder what has gone wrong. Instead of finding tranquility, we are often faced with struggle. Peace may not be granted hand in hand with faith as some sort of 'package deal'. Certainly, we shall find true peace at the end, but only if we persevere to the end. In the meantime, we can be sure our faith will be tested and we must not lose hope.

Hope is traditionally distinguished as the second of the three theological virtues - faith and charity being the other two. These virtues are called 'theological' because they are explicitly and directly concerned with one's relationship with God. They are understood to be, at the same time God's gift to us, and our own activity. For St. Thomas Aquinas, hope both *relies* on God and is *directed to* God. St. Thomas goes further to describe the two major sins against hope - despair and presumption. Despair occurs when we reach the point where we begin to believe we can no longer trust in God. Despair may seem like the obvious sin against hope, but Presumption is also something we need to be aware of. This may happen in two ways - either we rely on ourselves rather than God, or



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we might rely on God to do the inappropriate. St. Thomas observes that in themselves sins against hope may seem less serious than those against faith or charity, but in their own way, they are more devastating. Sins against hope will eventually lead a person to abandon the whole project of the Christian life.

The theme of hope is the dynamic element of the entire Bible. It is presented first and foremost as hope for the people of God as a community (i.e. the whole world as God's creation), and secondly, as hope for the individual. The story line of the Scriptures is an invitation to hopeful living. The book of Geneses begins with the thesis that the suffering and injustices of the world are not simply inevitable facts of existence, because the world of God's creating is wholly Good. Tragedy and exile have come through mankind's misuse of freedom, but throughout the Old Testament we see time and time again how God will not abandon creation. In the New Testament, Jesus preaches that salvation is now at hand. The Gospels teach us that the object of hope is not simply one's personal intimacy with God after death. Rather, the object of hope is the coming reign of God in which all creation will be brought into harmony and human society will be fully reconciled to God. This includes the transformation of human relationships and the structures of society at all levels. We, therefore, find the deepest gift of personal becoming not in removing ourselves from the affairs of human life but by entering into personal communion with God and into communion with all those for whom Christ died.

Union with God releases us from every fear that can paralyse the action of love. Only on this premise can a person be really free for the world, prophetic and critical in its regard, active *in* it and *for* it. Christian hope recognises that we are essentially interdependent, and therefore called to love and care for one another. To put it more simply, we achieve personal happiness by looking beyond ourselves. Part of the Legion's greatness lies in how it makes us particularly aware of the interdependence of the personal and social dimensions of hope for the true quest and welcoming of the reign of God coming among us. The Challenge for us Legionaries during these times of political uncertainty is to rediscover in depth the personal and communitarian dimensions of the theological virtue of hope. If we have hope, then, as Frank Duff once said, 'We *can* be Saints'.

Amen.

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