



Allocutio



Presentata Curia 22nd May 2008

Allocutio: Mary's humility

In this month of May we give a special devotion to Mary, Mother of God. And in the light of the spiritual reading I want to say a word around her littleness. It is Christian humility I want to speak about even if my understanding of it is limited. But it seems useful to stop and think about it because as the letter to the Philippians said, "Christ humbled himself." And if like Mary we follow him we must become humble.

It may be our basic insecurity that is behind it but the reality of the kettle calling the pot black is very real. Also very real is the hurt which people suffer when they imagine they have been slighted or not given recognition that was their due. Someone imagines he or she should have been promoted and it is given instead to someone who seemed insignificant or unworthy. The really mature person is immune to human respect and honour or recognition. All that matters is that God's will is being done, that the grace of God is working in their lives and around them. There are many small and humble people in Heaven whom no one ever heard of. But they have left a quiet legacy that has had greater influence than that of many a so-called leader.

Maturity and humility go together and they are to be seen in the person of the maiden of Nazareth. Her background was poor. A girl almost from nowhere! We actually know little about her. Could she read and write? What level of education had she? Were her skills just very menial, like washing and sewing? Or had she management skills? In some ways she seemed submissive to Joseph as when out of the blue he told her they were going to Egypt. We know nothing of that discussion if there even was one. She is for the greater part a background person whose personal life can be put alongside so many mothers who saw their sons killed. At a certain level absolutely nothing extraordinary.

So often Jesus said, "The one who humbles himself will be exalted." Given that God chose her to be the mother of his Son and given that she has been assumed into heaven, well then her humility must have been extraordinary. Now there can be false humility and good humility. Behind false humility is a concern for oneself because false humility is about giving a false impression, be it to yourself or to others. Real humility however is not concerned about self, it lies only in a soul that is focused on God and others. And that is what the Gospels reveal to us about Mary.

The really humble soul knows that God is in charge and that therefore it should not be unduly anxious about things. So when God asked Mary to be the Mother of the Saviour, apart from a question about the manner in which this was to take place, she gave an enthusiastic yes. This outreach to God continues in her Magnificat. Her outgoing spirit is shown in the visit to Elizabeth, in the welcome to the shepherds and wise men, in her concern for her lost Son, in her intervention for the couple at Cana, in her quiet presence on Calvary and with the Apostles in the run up to Pentecost.

I would not be unduly worried that we have so little else about her. That reflects her contentedness to stay in the background and also because the evangelists were happy that they had conveyed to us the essential Mary. Mary was in earthly terms a wife and mother who looked after carpenters. And since we are told nothing else about her years in Nazareth we can assume that her life as such was a pretty routine and hum-drum affair. Except that the home she provided for Jesus was the human grounding he was given in preparation for his ministry. She did a great job!

Today she is honoured all over the world. Even on earth she knew that she was the Saviour's mother. In her heart she knew that all generations would call her blessed. But she wasn't caught up in seeking any privileges on earth. Her maturity is shown in her simple acceptance of whatever God sent her in the



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present moment. She knew the one thing alone that is important: she was close to God and he was close to her. And when you have that in your life you need nothing else, no title, no honour, no recognition.

So many of us can get sucked into the culture of seeking to belong to the honour lists of the world. Whose name can you drop? Why have I not been recognised for my gifts? Surely God gave me talents that should be deployed in a better way? Now don't get me wrong! I am not saying that we should meekly hide our gifts under a bushel. But if others do not notice us or if we are bypassed we must not become petty.

If we accept the invitation of God to belong to the inner circle of the Trinity and become friends of the supreme Lord, who himself became humbler yet, even to accepting death on a Cross, then what if all lower courts in whatever form they are should bypass us. How better to be approved and endorsed by that Court than the rest. Indeed how sad that so many who belong to earthly circles and are respected and lauded in them are failing so poorly in respect of the final Court. Mary who was chosen by the higher Court needed no human honours at all.

Mary, more than anyone else, lived those words of scripture: to be holy and spotless and to live through love in his presence (Eph 1:4). They are words to be taken to heart. To be holy is to have the right balance in life about God and others and self. Until we get that right we'll not be fully spotless. But God is calling us to be that and with his grace we will be just as Mary was. And the way to that holiness is to learn to live through love which can only be perfected by coming to his presence. Indeed one is impossible without the other.

It is only by putting God at the centre and like Mary submitting to his will, which is to live in love in every situation, that we will be both humble and mature. How the world badly needs people who pursue that way rather than the way of worldly honours and titles. Those who try that way often end up frustrated, full of jealousy and envy or even grow to hate and destroy. What a mess in the life of so many notaries. The mature humble person, like Mary, who works quietly away, happy that God sees them, leaves a far better heritage.

Amen

Fr Paul Churchill