



Allocutio



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Allocutio: The Spirit will lead you to the Whole Truth

When Jesus was put to death on the Cross he was portrayed as an evil man when in fact he was a good man. His Jewish critics wanted to destroy him; he suffered the death of the worst criminals. And the disciples had to face into the uphill struggle of trying to convince the world of the truth.

In this they got a great help from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helped them to give witness. He gave them words and talents to help them. The very first helps they got were the gift to pray and to have with them Our Blessed Lady praying with them. And if we are to be effective in our challenge we too need to start in prayer and with Our Lady as we confront new challenges of the future.

If a survey of bad family life in Ireland 70 years ago was conducted you would get a very negative report. It would mention the alcoholism, the violent and self-centred men, the cruel and harsh mothers, and various other forms of abuse. And it would depict a dreadful image of family life in Ireland. But it would not be the balanced truth.

My father was an abandoned child. A guard found him. He was given into the care of Bon Secours sisters who looked after him and many other unwanted and abandoned babies and children. Nothing could take from that pain he always had of being abandoned but he did find great love in that home as did all those others who were part of it, many of whom I have met over the years. One nun became as a mother to him and he grieved her passing when it came. I was twelve then. When my father himself was 12/13 he was sent to a Boarding School run by Christian Brothers. There one brother took him under his wings and became as a father to him, even helping him to find out the identity of his birth mother so that he could go to pray at her grave. And I have heard of many other such stories from others. Not to mention all the good and decent experience we have all had of nuns and brothers over the years. I looked in the Report to see if there was any reference to the Bon Secours sisters. There was none. I went to see if there was a reference to the Boarding School my father attended. There was none. The report didn't cover the Good News. Did it mention the good work that has been done in Regina Coeli over the years? No. And so, just as when Jesus was crucified, so has all the good news being suppressed and hidden and a different image given. It is the Holy Spirit who can help us to restore the truth since he is the Spirit of Truth. Let us pray for his guidance on how best to let the good works of Christ shine out.

But we cannot deny that something did go wrong in many Institutions. My father would be deeply upset at what some have been subjected to. How is it to be explained? There are no easy answers and yet I have a feeling that part of the explanation requires a fresh look at our history.

We all know from our history that the Catholic community in Ireland suffered terrible persecution. Wolfe Tone was not a Catholic but he describes the catholic population in 1791 as suffering wretched misery. And this was before 1798 and the utter humiliation inflicted on Wexford and the surrounding areas into the 1800s. I have read a bit about the 1830s and the grinding poverty of the people. And all this before the Famine and the slums of Dublin in the early 20th century described in Strumpet City. People struggled to cope with the poverty and the emotional damage in them. We gained our political independence, we have become economically better off but one thing we have not really done is confront the dreadful emotional damage that was inflicted on the Catholic community over 300 years of persecution.

We know that some who joined priesthood or religious life to escape poverty or because their parents wanted to gain some status. Apart from the baggage they may have carried from their homes, including a deep anger,

they were now trying to live a life-style that by nature they could not carry. It had to be a recipe for problems. We do not deny that wrong was done but I have a heart for those who were thrown into this by the circumstances of family histories and who need healing. Let us pray for all those who are the victims of our brutal history and ask God's healing on it.

As I say we will need the help of the Holy Spirit with this. One foundation gift we need is to deepen our faith in Our Lord's love for us. It is in prayer we will sense his being with us. We need to be patient too. There is a time to be silent, there is a time to speak. We must not fall into the trap of anger which has bedevilled our country. Just remember that the letters IRA are the Latin for *anger*. It is a most dangerous emotion. How well St. Peter says to us, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Do not give an opportunity to the devil".

But we need also to arm ourselves with truth. And we need to witness to it. This morning someone texted me to go into a certain website and suggested I answer a certain question on that website. That gave me a chance to give witness. It was good to know that there is a net work of people on God's side who are learning to deal with this modern world. We need to be ready for these new battles.

But at the end of the day I urge you all to come back to something I believe Frank Duff would say. At the end of the day, when all the raw emotions promoted by the media subside, what will make the most telling effect is personal witness. Who remained after Jesus if not those very people who got close to him and whose hearts he had won, even if they were weak. This storm will pass and people will calm down and there will be opportunities to speak to people, some family members, neighbours, work colleagues and so on. But more than any debate must come the kind of people we are ourselves. The good God they meet in us will always have a deeper effect than any superficial broadcast.

And finally in your Curia, precisely where you run homes for mothers and children and men who can be the victims of our past, yes compounded by modern ills too, be on your guard not to let the old enemy sow his darnel among your wheat. If you come across difficult cases bring them to others and do not be tempted to do a solo run. It is being united together as a team under the prayers and the protection of the Virgin Mary that the Holy Spirit will protect us all from evil and put us on the best road.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill