



Acies Allocutio



Presentata Curia Sunday 25th March 2012

My dear fellow Legionaries,

We make our offering of service to Our Lady on this Feast of the Annunciation. Or, if you like, the feast of the Incarnation. It celebrates God asking Mary to be his mother but also the adopting by Jesus of our human nature and the human condition of weakness due to sin. The great God of the Universe opts to become one of us and this can only mean that God wants to be our friend. With this annunciation there must come a great peace over us.

But we must understand what this peace is. Pope Paul VI said at the UN in 1964 that peace is not merely the absence of war. It is first and foremost a peace of our hearts, a peace that comes from one fact: God is on our side. God is more than on our side, he has joined us and has shared our life. He has put on our flesh and so knows and understands our condition. He has not rejected us or spurned us despite how we treat him. And so we can say with St. Paul, "If God is on our side who can be against us?" Yes, the basis of our peace is simply because God has befriended us and taken our side.

There is another side to the peace that God wants to give us. Not to be anxious, not to be afraid. Did you not hear it from the angels at Bethlehem, it was their first words to the shepherds—"Do not be afraid"—just as it was Gabriel's first words to Mary at the Annunciation. I think the Angel said this to her straight away because that was her normal state of soul and he didn't want to disturb it. Mary had a deep trust in God that kept her calm and when the angel said "Hail full of grace!" that was in part what he was saying to her and also about her. It was this same deep trust that allowed her to approach Jesus at the wedding feast of Cana and made her persist despite what seemed a rebuff from Jesus.

We must pray for the grace to be like her. Because it is our fears and anxieties that end up doing us most damage and taking our peace away. They can lead to us getting relationships wrong, causing jealousy, misinterpreting events so that we see evil where no harm was intended, and even worse causing one person to set on another.

What I am saying is not just theory. I have seen it and heard of it with my own senses. A girl speaks to the brother of a school friend about how her friend is. The boy-friend or husband is highly suspicious because of his own anxieties and fears that she does not love him and so a row ensues over something that does not exist, all caused by fear and anxiety. Major world leaders fear that another nation has nuclear weapons and so out of fear and anxiety they set out on a journey of dealing with it which does not help international relations.

So anxiety then turns out to be the mother of sin. And that is why we pray at Mass "protect us from all anxiety". God is coming to us with another message, the message of peace. He wants us to calm down and not be anxious. Let me share with you a trick I have been learning in life: to come to God and to quieten my heart in his presence. I am slowly learning not to worry what others think about me, even if they read me wrong and unjustly. All that matters is that Jesus understands me and is on my side. Please don't get me wrong, I can get annoyed if I feel I am misrepresented but what brings me deep peace is to stop in the presence of God and gain peace from the knowledge that God knows the truth.

But the greatest peace of all comes from God reconciling us to himself. I don't think we stop enough to think of the stunning reality of what we celebrate today. God has made himself our brother; he has become one of us. That is what happened at the Incarnation. It is really staggering to think that the God



Acies Allocutio



who is behind the whole of this huge Universe as we know it bothered to bond himself with us to the extent that he became a human himself. Why would he do that?

The answer has to be a special love for us. He attached himself to our sinful flesh; that is the proof that our sins could not block the love that God has for us. By accepting to live in and through our flesh God has already dealt with our sins. There is no sin that God does not understand, that is not forgivable. And the baby Jesus who lies with outstretched arms in the crib is God saying to each sinner: Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened under the weight of your sins. I will give your souls rest and peace because I have come to take them all away.

There is one other thing I'd like to say here. We have to be realistic and face the fact that peace is absent from many places and societies and homes. The challenge lies before us to commit ourselves to the cause of peace. We will achieve this by turning often to Jesus and receiving his peace in our own hearts and so disposing our hearts to be bearers of great peace. By having the peace of God in our own hearts we can give it to others. It may be useful to record these words, "Only the waters which in perfect stillness lie, give back an undistorted image of the sky!"

When we speak of Mary as the Mother of God we do not mean that the eternal God came from her. Motherhood refers to a necessity in our particular part of the Universe. It is the means whereby any of us begins life in this world, gets nutrition until we can exist to some degree independently. But a mother is more than just a being in whom we begin physical life and gain strength for life here. A mother is someone who cares for us and keeps a good eye on us. A mother's love is quite unique and very special. A mother is someone unique to us all; someone with whom there is a special psychological and spiritual bond that moulds us all which leaves a very deep mark on us all.

All living beings have a mother even those few species that do not have a male and so do not need fathers. That is how our world works. And so the only way God could come into our world and be united with his creation was by means of a mother. Though her God, who pre-existed her, came into our world and united himself with everything here. The very basic elements of the universe were knitted into him in the womb: carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen. He became exposed to radiation coming from her body heat. Cells and tissues common to all life forms developed. But also developed a human soul, a human way of feeling and interacting, and a human sense of people around. So Mary is mother of God insofar as she gave him his entry into our world.

Might he have come in another form? Might he have come at a different time? St. Paul puts it well: "At the appointed time he came, born of a woman". She was a creature, born in time, after a long span of history. But the time was ripe and so was she. God had waited for this moment, the moment when the harvest of humanity had ripened to produce this most suitable recipient for God who wanted to come among us. She was God's doing and so there is no need for us to be jealous of her. We too have our place and our time and that too is under his management. But insofar as God needed a co-operator to assist him she was it. No creature has two mothers so there could only be one for him who came to join us: Mary of Nazareth.

She is mother of God so that God could come into our world at the appointed time and inject us with his salvation. Today we honour her as the special one of our race. Her privilege is also a responsibility, for her task was for the good of us all. When she said "Yes" she said it for us all. And "us all" means the total universe: atoms, molecules, cells and basic organisms as well as the animal kingdom and humans. No wonder distant stars and cattle and sheep and donkeys get a mention too at Christmas. For Jesus came for them all. As St. Paul said in his letter to the Romans, "The whole of creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rm 8:18ss).



Acies Allocutio



Nothing better could speak to us of that than the fact of the Eucharist. Just think of the molecules of that wheat which become the Body and Blood of Christ. What human gets that privilege? The wheat can say to us: “So you think you are something you who take us and flake us and bake us and cake us! But some of you have become the Body of Christ. Follow that! And by the way remember we do that so that you can receive him!”

Mary who is Mother of God is in fact the Queen of the Universe. Her concern is humanity and the Cosmos. Her commission is so wound up with redemption that she had to be present at the Cross and be placed close to God in Heaven. From there she works with him in the dispensation of graces since she does not change from her task as the co-operator in redemption.

And today we might pray to her for our intention: that peace would reign and that God’s grace would triumph over those evil inclinations to do violence to others or ourselves which take root in hearts from time to time. We might ask her help for those disturbances that arise from things not going well in life, for those who have suffered a deficiency in love, for those upset by bad news about their health, for those who have had bad experiences. Through her intercession on our behalf may peace touch our deep inner souls and may it radiate to others. Amen

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill