



# Allocutio



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Allocutio: "Go and preach repentance and forgiveness to the ends of the earth."

"Go and preach repentance and forgiveness to the ends of the earth." This is the command of the Risen Lord to us. But what does it mean in our own lives and in the lives of those around us to whom we must bring this message?

Human nature has fallen and its potential is damaged and its energy is depleted. You only need to look into yourself to see this. You sin, you are feeling humiliated or down or upset. Or someone sins against you and makes you feel small and rubbished in some ways and again your inner energy is knocked. Or take the person who is blind spiritually, emotionally and psychologically and see how he or she goes about selfishly looking after themselves, not considering any other person. There is no place in their heart for others. They have no sense of "we".

Christ puts forward an alternative way. It is the way of loving God and the neighbour and yourself in a holistic way. He says to everyone: you have great potential in you. You are of real value in God's plans. You are to have confidence in yourself. Your call is to stand with me caring for all humanity alongside me. Forget yourself and reach out with me to others. The world in which everyone looks after the others is the world of my Father's Kingdom. That is what I was saying when I said "I was hungry and you fed me and so on."

All of us have to repent. The best witnesses to repentance are those who did once live selfishly and now have changed. They can authentically speak of the importance of repenting and give witness to this command. That is the importance of the woman who looked after Jesus feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Maybe at one stage she lived selfishly. But a real repentance has taken place and now she can love much more deeply than Simon can who has kept the rules but is in fact quite miserly in his welcome. I think too of those who have repented of drink of drugs, of sex, of gambling, of violence. In the Gospels the faults of Peter are high-lighted so as to show the change that has taken place in him by God's grace and to make him a better witness to repentance.

In short we can all witness to the command to repent insofar as we admit our faults and how by the grace of God we have changed. And believe you me there is plenty of material in each of us to keep a conference going over a full week-end if not a week!

There is another side however and that is the need to forgive. Did you ever think of what that word "forgive" means? It is about "for giving". We were made to give, to reach out, to be brothers and sisters of each other and to the poorest of the poor. The problem is this as I said initially: you sins and betrayals and faults can get you down. That sinful habit you have—the caustic tongue, the waste of money on your unhealthy habit, the sexual weakness, the judgemental attitude, whatever it is—such things can get you down and lower your energies and cause you to be discouraged. As St. Paul says, "The very thing I do not want to do I do". You are not master of yourself but sin is. The effect: your energies are lowered, you become pre-occupied with yourself and your weakness and guilt, and you are distracted from what you should be doing.



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The great power of forgiveness is that you can let the guilt go, the feelings of being useless, no good, a fraud. You are freed to give of yourself and to release the drive for good in you. Instead of being turned in on yourself you can go out to others. And here I do not speak only of God forgiving us but of our responsibility to forgive and release others from what may be holding them back. A married man said to me recently that there is also an effect on yourself. You forgive the other. They are released. And you in turn are released. Perhaps he was commenting on his own married relationship.

But let me come now to something deeper. I have been reading something of St. John of the Cross recently. He had a dreadful treatment at the hands of fellow Carmelites in Toledo when he was 35. This led him to a deepening in his spirituality and he developed his understanding of what he called the dark night of the soul. What he found out was that suffering is in fact the privileged place of God's inflow. It is in situations beyond our control that healing takes place in us and often God allows trials to us to help us grow. Think of when a mother begins to get a child to walk who prefers to stay in the pram! The dark night (often seeming like a reversal of direction or like a violation of one's being) can be bewildering as we grope through the fog. Worst is to feel God has abandoned one. The response is not, "It's okay, there is an explanation"; rather "It's not alright, it's a mess, but still God is close. Now is not the time to lose faith." Because the great repentance the Lord wants us to make is to believe in God's love and power and never to lose faith. I think faith in God's goodness also helps us forgive.

The hurt we suffer at the hands of others can make it hard to forgive. How to deal with pain creatively? Those inner pains of the night (embarrassment, insults, a put down, the humiliation of failure or rejection) are moments to gain freedom from personal weaknesses crippling you (anger, self pity, crippling shyness, distorted lust). On offer in the night is freedom from ourselves. Belief and trust in a loving God who is close can turn the pain of death throes into pangs of new birth. With a loving God we can let go the pain and move on to a new future, even face into a gale, trusting the words "Do not be afraid". Another way of putting it all: "I don't need that; I need You!" So if someone judges you wrong, rubbished you in front of others, what does it matter if God knows the truth and loves you. The knowledge of the love of God allows us not to be imprisoned.

What makes all this possible in the constant presence of God to us. But a dilemma lies in this, that God is beyond all experience. We must first always allow that God is hidden, not graspable! You can only meet him in faith and love. These are not to be confused with nor measured by feelings; nor with supernatural phenomena. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe", as the Risen Jesus said to doubting Thomas. Faith, not insights or evidence, gives us direct contact with God. And charity unites the soul with God. If you rely on nothing else you cannot be let down. The more we let go of our props, even nurturing our hurts, the more God comes in.

The great embodiment of that among us humans was Our Blessed Lady, the most supple instrument in the hand of God. Let us pray that in our very beings we can imitate her Son in his witness to forgiveness and answer him in his call to a repentance, in other words to turn to a new way of dealing with a world in which sin is always showering its punches at us.

Amen.

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