



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Mary's Assumption

When I was a young lad one of my favourite films was El Cid. I think it had Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren in it. But I was more captivated by certain aspects of it. I don't think anyone will forget the final scene in which the dead hero was sent out on his steed to lead the troops to give them courage. I hadn't seen it for a long time until some gloomy winter's evening last year some channel showed it again. Film techniques have improved and this oldie seemed in some way Hollywood slap dash. And yet it held me again. And now I saw afresh what it was that had held me years ago. It is the story of a noble knight in Spain, perhaps in the 11th century who despite trying to live the highest standards of decency was rejected and banished. On the one hand his wife bitterly hated and despised him for killing her father in a fair duel. On the other hand the King of Spain rejected him because El Cid was strong in character while the King was weak. And so he was banished. Through all his trials he remained noble and strong. Other women crossed his path but he remained faithful to his estranged wife. Even when people spoke ill of the King he defended him.

Then there comes that moment when his perseverance and goodness wins his wife back. He is still in the outback. They take refuge in an old farm building one night. The next morning he comes out and finds the whole armies of Spain standing there before him asking his leadership. 24 hours earlier he had been in a most lonely place; now he has gained the biggest personal victory of his life.

For me the Assumption of Our Lady is her moment of total vindication. What suffering she had been through. We know the bits left to us in the Gospels. But I can just imagine in the months and maybe years after Christ died people would be heard talking of her. "Oh is that who she is. Poor woman. Wasn't her son that eejit who got himself executed? Simpleton he was. But what do you expect. Sure there was a want in his mother. Do you know that she was from one of those families around Jerusalem that used serve in the Temple? But they got rid of her to some poor carpenter up in that backwoods placed in Galilee ... what is the name of that place ... oh yes, Nazareth. Could you imagine. And then to get herself pregnant. Sure with a mother like that 'tis no wonder that that Jesus fellow never had a chance. Fair play to that John fellow for keeping an eye on her!" Oh Simeon's sword did not end at the Cross.

Few knew the reality of her inner soul, how it had been focused solely on doing what God asked her and that she had trusted him all along. That did not make it easy. But God is faithful to the promises he makes to his faithful ones and in the Assumption we see his vindication of this most humble and most faithful soul who herself suffered so much in saying yes to his will. All the misjudgment, all the tittle tattle of parish pumps, is put in its place. Be silent all you who would have dismissed this woman with contempt. She was the jewel you failed to spot.

Her Assumption stands as a sign for us all who opt to go with Jesus and find ourselves calumniated on his behalf. Or anyone who has been trying to do God's will and whose motives are taken from the Gospel and finds that even other followers of Jesus misjudge or misunderstand out of jealousy, or prejudice or the like. And we can all suffer at times like that.

St. Ignatius of Loyola has a famous meditation called the two standards. They are based on the three temptations of Christ. The standards of the great dragon, Lucifer, include love of your name and



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status and reputation, having people speak well of you, getting the best seats in social functions. But Christ chose the lowest place and his followers must desire to be misunderstood, rejected, not appreciated for their talents. We have to rise above other people's opinions of us. We are to accept failure and being misunderstood. We are to accept lack of appreciation without bitterness. And we are to love others when they do not love us.

All very fine in theory. But in practice? How hard! But how harder for God to be treated as a sinner and a creature who could be snuffed out! That is the galling thing, that standard of Christ! It can be very hard to keep your dignity when someone insults you and mistreats you most unfairly. But both Jesus on the Cross and Mary standing below him showed a nobility and dignity that makes us tremble. How can I say yes to those standards? Perhaps by looking at Mary's Assumption and being reminded that God has a glory awaiting all those who live the most noble of standards!

Is that not what we see in the many works of art that show the assumed Mary surrounded by angels and saints? Oh my friends we are becoming saints when we go through terrifying self-doubt and struggle to hold nerve and calm in the midst of many trials, especially when we seem rebuffed and rejected by others in so many forms. Let us be the real saints who stand with Mary in her glory by accepting with dignity and nothing but a loving response every hurt and slight thrown at us. May Mary help us sinners in our weakness.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill