



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Heaven and Mary

I remember years ago helping out giving a course in Medical Ethics in Crumlin, the hospital for sick children. I recall them telling me of a twelve year old child who was fatally ill who prayed a lot and he could say to his family, "Don't cry, sure I'm just going to Heaven". That's the short answer to the question: where do we go when we die? Heaven is where we go.

But maybe that is not quite right. Someone says: Heaven begins here in this world. If Heaven is about being in the presence of God, then we have to accept that Mary was already in Heaven in some way from the moment she conceived Jesus. Being free from sin from the very start of her existence was also another sign of Heaven near her. Indeed in some way Heaven has been brought into this world and shown to us through Mary. I think the Christmas scene certainly speaks to us of that, not least with the presence of the angelic host. And what must Mary have wondered in her heart as she pondered all that? Heaven was so close to her.

Here is another mystery: in some way or other God and Heaven are present to us already in and through the things of this world. In fact there is a sense that we are already in touch with Heaven except that there appears to be some sort of veil-covering that throws a shadow over the reality. There are versions of religion which speak of God as far away, as this world being bad and evil. Our Catholic Faith says not. God is near, he is just behind the veils of this world which in fact often throw his shadow onto it so that we see something of his presence. And we Catholics believe that especially in the Eucharist we are very close to Heaven, already sharing in the heavenly liturgy with Mary and the angels and the saints.

The Apostles Creed is very interesting. Jesus died. Where did he go? It does not say that he went to heaven but to that place where all the dead from Adam on slept or waited. His very going to them brought them in touch with Heaven. Since he was always with the Father, he was always in some way in Heaven as the Transfiguration showed but he did endure living in this veiled world so as to help us. When he rose he showed that it is possible for human nature to have full and total contact with the real. In other words he rid himself of whatever it is of this life that hides the deeper and truer reality that is already there. What Jesus showed us in the Resurrection is the way it really is; what we see all the time is the distorted version due to sin. And death paradoxically is part of the cure from this veiled world.

Now we come to the Assumption of Our Lady. If sin is the cause of the distorted view we now have—and it is the main cause of the distortion—and if death is a major step in purging us of that distortion, then what happens in the case of someone not affected by sin? There is an intimate link then between the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the doctrine of the Assumption. Precisely because she had no sin, her whole existence contained the minimum of distortion. She was already in close union with Heaven in this life. She more than any prophet or saint was able for the Archangel Gabriel. I have already indicated the significance of the Christmas events. At Cana too there is the hint of heaven in the miracles of the water come wine. The water represents the boring ordinariness of this life. The wine represents new life in God's Kingdom. Mary mediated that and so shows her proximity to Heaven.

In the Doctrine of the Assumption we are saying that at the end of her earthly life she did not go through a death process like the rest of us. What process she went through we do not know. Nor does it matter. In the case of Mary whatever veil it was that hid her eyes from the full view of reality it was lifted and she passed into the real world that is. And now from there she sees



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absolutely clearly without any hindrance. But it is worth remarking that if she was in close touch with reality always, then her participation in the Passion was as raw as raw can be. She was so innocent no psychological pain-killer could have shielded her from the sword that pierced her heart. But equally her joy at the Resurrection of her Son was deep. She sees the world in a better way, she sees history and its events, she sees into the depth of our souls. She was made by God to be a mother and she has a mother-soul and so sees all with the heart of a mother. That explains her continuing mission with us, a mission she clearly displays from time to time as when God allows the veils to be withdrawn for our benefit and some specially chosen among us meet her, like Bernadette. I know we have to be careful. There can be bogus claims. How many other reported visions of Our Lady were made around Lourdes and its hinter-lands after the apparitions to St. Bernadette? Recently the head of the CDF has said that only a handful of the reported 1500 Marian apparitions around the world in recent times have been given approval.

Have you ever been up a mountain in bad weather? The mist is around you, the wind and rain is in your face. You use a compass to try and keep straight. Sometimes people put little mounds of stones up every few yards to help walkers keep to the right path. The world seems just to be a world of ten meters in any direction, dark and grey and just rocks, bits of heather and grass. But reality is different. I have often seen a bright moment shine through; the colour changes, the visibility increases and the sun shines and now even the fifty meters around you has a completely different shape. And whenever the Blessed Virgin appears it is as if a shaft of light comes in from heaven to help us see reality better. But remember the map has already been given to us by Jesus and the complete lifting of clouds and the true revealing of reality has to wait. It will have to wait till death.

These Feasts of the Assumption and the Queenship of Our Lady are celebrations of that reality beyond the veil which covers us just now. They are joyful Feasts of our faith and our hope that we are very close to heaven. Mary is fully there on our behalf. It was only right that the Mother of the Church and indeed humanity should go there first and help prepare things for us with her Son.

Mary, you are not far from us no more than we are far from Heaven. Pray for us who still journey in this veiled world and protect us from all harm. Be a good mother to us all.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill