



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Allocutio: Mary conceives in gentle silence.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception is not about the moment Jesus came into existence but relates to that moment in which the Blessed Mother of God began her existence. It is not about her coming into existence as such. In that the mystery of her being is not really different from any of us since the coming into existence of us all is a strange event and must always have a mystery to it. St. Paul may have put his finger on it when he used that expression “at the appointed time”. He was of course referring to the moment when Jesus was announced to and conceived by Mary. But there is a sense for all of us that we all have been given our appointed time. Why was I conceived of the parents I had at the moment I was conceived, where they were. Why was I not born in better times or indeed worse? But we should not agonise about that. That was God’s decision and so where I find myself must be his will. My job is to make the best of where I am.

What makes the Immaculate Conception of Mary unique is that unlike us Mary was conceived completely free of the taint of original sin. She was from the start “full of grace”. God the Father who is not living under the rules of time used the merits of Christ’s death and applied them at that moment Mary was conceived to completely free Mary from all original sin at the moment of her Immaculate Conception. Why was she chosen and not me? But there we should not worry for God has a plan there too. Some woman had to be the vehicle or entry point of Our Lord’s coming among us and God ordained it to be Mary. In fact the choice of God for a special people, the Jews or Israelites, and his special devotion to them across the centuries was all part of his plan to save the whole human race. We may ask as others have, “How odd of God to choose the Jews” but they were the people who were to produce Mary who would be the place in time in which Jesus would come to save all mankind. She is the end of that whole process of preparing the way for the Lord. Oh yes others would have their part but hers is quite unique: she is to be the recipient of God for us all. All the patriarchs, prophets and people of the Old Testament were part of an intricate work of art leading to the moment when she conceived Jesus.

Let us look closer at that moment. When she asked the Archangel Gabriel, “How is this to come about since I know no man, since I am a virgin?”, she was not arguing. She was merely seeking further clarification about what to do. But God didn’t want her to do anything. God wanted her to be still in mind and soul. “The Holy Spirit will over-shadow you and you will conceive and bear a son and you must call him Jesus.” God was saying to her, “Look Mary, you don’t have to do anything; God will do it for you”. And so Mary says, “Be it done unto me. . .” not “let me do it so!”

There is a great lesson in that for us all because sometimes we imagine we have to go about in life like a headless chicken, being full of activity. Sometimes, indeed, often God is asking us to stay still and let him do the work in us. And those who belong to the service of Mary are called to be like that at times, simply to be still and let God do his work in his own time, in his own way.

We can often be like those children who are just so awkward in their mother’s arms as they twist and turn and refuse to be still and make life so difficult for mammy. In some similar way before God we are restless rather than being quiet and letting him do his work in us. I suspect that is what Mary was like and what so attracted God to her: she was quiet and submissive. So many artists who have tried to represent that moment of the Incarnation portray Mary in prayer. She is still before God and he is drawn by her stillness and her humble and gentle demeanour.



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There is a wonderful passage in the Book of Wisdom that is worth listing to : “When gentle silence enveloped all things and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed” (Wis 18:14-15). This is clearly a prophecy about the Incarnation, the event in which the Son of God took on human flesh in a doomed planet. But what is interesting is that this prophecy speaks to us of a gentle silence. That was the environment that drew God. And for all of us, if we wish to draw God and his life to us, we must seek out a state of gentle silence. That is often the work of prayer, to learn to be still before God. Any of you who went to that film Into Great Silence will recall how it had that effect. That is what Mary had going for her and how she attracted the Son of God.

By her prayers may we keep our souls in peace and accept without fuss or anxiety the various cards in life that God deals us. May we all learn to say with her in gentleness, “May it be done unto me according to your word”.

Amen.

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