



Allocutio



PRAESENTATA CURIA

Allocutio 22nd December 2016

Shepherds and Magi

There is a line in the rubrics of the Mass which instructs the priest that after he has placed the sacred species on the Altar after the elevation at the Consecration he genuflects in adoration.

That is the attitude that should be in all our hearts after the consecration at Mass. Our Lord has come among us just as he did at Bethlehem although now in a different manner. A traditional Irish response often said at that moment is: My Lord and my God, words taken from St. Thomas. And it is not inappropriate that often the acclamation sung at Mass at Christmas time is: O Come let us adore him, Christ the Lord. Venite Adoremus Dominum.

It will be useful to help us in our adoration to reflect on the Shepherds and the Wise men about how to dispose ourselves in his presence.

Shepherds in those days were the lowest grade in society. They were uneducated, rough and unruly, socially avoided. They were regarded as fit to mind sheep, not to assist in human affairs. The fact that the angels appeared to them and not the rest of Israel reminds us that God does not look at appearances but at the heart. If society preferred to leave them out there on the fringes God saw it different. These too were souls as invited to heaven as the suavist and sophisticated. And God had arranged for them that the new born King of the Jews would be in a place they would be at home with: a manger. (Have you ever noticed in life that when something doesn't work out you realise later it might just have had a reason. You missed the bus for the film and went home disappointed and then came the knock on the door of the friend you would have missed! So, disappointed and all as Joseph and Mary were that there was no room in the Inn God in fact was in the event so that the shepherds could see Jesus. They would never have gone near the Inn!)

Anyway the shepherds go over to the manger and adore in the way they know best. They look in marvel into the manger to see that the child was real and

they tell everything to Joseph and Mary. They do not kneel or adore the way the Magi will. But they communicated so well the mystery they had been given privilege of knowing that all marvelled at it and Mary kept it in her heart. I ask you never to forget that effect on Mary as it is so important: Mary kept it in her heart, not in her head. These unruly and rough shepherds by their form of worship touched the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We could examine our conscience and ask whether the way we pray and worship or share our faith would touch the heart of anyone.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God. They have entered into the praise of heaven which had sung: Glory to God in the Highest and they do the same, glorifying God. And it is worth remembering that when we are at Mass we are an extension of the Heavenly liturgy, surrounded by so great a host of witnesses (Heb 12:1ss) around the throne of God and the Lamb of God and indeed we may even say Mary's little Lamb. You find this expressed in Rev 5: And I heard every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and in the sea and all therein saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever". And the four living creature said: "Amen". This is the basis of the great doxology said in each Mass at the end of the Eucharistic prayer.

Let us compare this a moment to the Magi. When they saw the star over the place Mary was with the child they went in and fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their treasures they left gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They are called Magi, wise men, university professors from the great centres of learning, cultured, behaviour socially acceptable. For example they had presented their credentials to King Herod! Quite a contrast with the shepherds and their more humble fumbling ways. The shepherds only had a story to tell; the kings left material gifts. And some of us have gifts to offer which are also acceptable to God but do we give them? What do we present at the offertory of the Mass? What does God want? He would like our hearts given to him so that he can pour his love into them. If we can present our material goods to his service, fine. If we can offer our suffering, fine too. And if we can offer our prayers, great. But above all our hearts.

I often wondered why English called it Christmas? (Compare with Nollaig, Weihnachten, Natale). If you stop to think you will see that so much of the nativity scenes are totally present at every celebration of Mass, not just the Gloria. The Word of God has become alive among us. We present gifts which

are accepted by God, we are joined by the heavenly hosts (hence Holy, Holy, Holy). But above all Christ the Lord comes among us on the Altar and then in communion he comes to make his home in our hearts.

Let us like Mary open a place in our hearts for him. Let us rejoice in our lowliness like the shepherds. And even if our faith or worship is a bit higgledy-piggledy at times let it be true in our hearts. If it has some modicum of sophistication like the wise men let us thank God and offer ourselves to his service.

Let us come as we are and know that our offerings and worship sincerely given, even if imperfect are acceptable to the babe of Bethlehem!