



# Allocutio



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Allocutio: The Humility of Our Lady.

Two hours ago the papacy of Pope Benedict the 16th came to an end, as Pope Benedict became the first pope in over 600 years to abdicate the papacy and go into retirement rather than die in office. There is much speculation in the media about what his motives were, and much more speculation about who his successor will be. Inevitably, people compare Benedict's decision to resign to Pope John Paul the 2nd, who heroically stayed on till the end. Yet, there is a tremendous lesson to be learned today from the actions of Pope Benedict- and that lesson is humility.

Benedict during his last audience yesterday said that "In recent months, I felt that my strength had decreased, and I asked God with insistence in prayer to enlighten me with His light to make me take the right decision – not for my sake, but for the good of the Church". The only concern Benedict the 16th has in what is best for the Church in its' mission to proclaim Christ.

Frank Duff writes on p28 of the handbook concerning humility that it is "the recognition and unaffected acknowledgement of what one really is before God; the understanding that one's worthlessness alone is one's own".

Pope Benedict recognizes what he is before God. He was the servant of the servants of God, the Pope. But he was also a human being, in need of God's grace like the rest of us. He had a profound awareness of his own limits, and a profound awareness of the needs of the Church. But in going into retirement, he has shown the world that the Papacy is not about Power or glory or prestige or wealth, but about Christ, about serving God and His Church.

In choosing his successor, the cardinals will look for who the Holy Spirit intends to be the person to lead the Church in its mission of bringing souls back to Jesus Christ.

It says in the handbook that a mark of humility is a preference for humble and little sought out tasks and I think we can see this in Pope Benedict's decision to retire into seclusion and prayer in a monastery. He has given up the highest position in the Church in order to live a far humbler life. We too are all called to this; to be willing to take on and perform any task that the Lord puts in our way, even when we would rather be doing a different task.

Regarding humility, St Thomas says that it belongs to the virtue of temperance. Humility according to Thomas, while not being the greatest of the virtues (charity is), is the first step in the acquisition of virtue in the sense that it removes obstacles, because through humility pride is expelled, and it is pride that is the chief obstacle in our efforts to acquire virtue. (ST, II, Q161, art 5).

Humility, far from making us weak, actually makes us strong. It opens up the doors of divine grace, and allows all our apostolic actions to bear fruit. Pride, the opposing vice of humility, is what makes us weak and not bear fruit. It is one of the most dangerous of vices because it blinds us to the reality of God, and does so in such a way that we do not even realise we're being blinded!



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Lent is an especially appropriate time for this virtue. The priest says on Ash Wednesday “thou art dust, and to dust thou must return”. Lent starts with this call to humility and throughout Lent, through prayer, penance, and almsgiving, we can grow in this virtue. Jesus says “learn of Me, for I am meek, and humble of heart”.

It is from the humble heart of Christ that all our apostolic fruitfulness comes.

But we are never alone in striving for humility. While it may be the task of a lifetime to constantly grow in this virtue, we have in Heaven our advocate and mother Mary. In the Magnificat Mary proclaims “He looks on his servant in her lowliness, henceforth all ages will call me blessed”,(Lk 1:48).

Throughout the Gospels, Mary is the model for humility. She’s never far from Jesus, but is always present, from Jesus’ birth to his death at Calvary, she is always there. Yet, she never takes the focus off her son, but always when she speaks she pulls us closer to her son, to Jesus Christ. In all the gospels she only says a few things, but those things are profound. Its quite extraordinary. Few other people in the gospels manage to do this. Even Peter, when we think of him in the gospels, does not manage this. It’s a bit like if I was on Moore street, handing our miraculous medals and doing street contact work. I might succeed in getting them to think about Christ, or even go back to mass and pray once more, but they would still remember me. They’d still remember me as the person they were talking to.

But with the humility of Mary, she manages to succeed in shifting the attention onto Christ completely. God is not hindered in any way from operating through Mary on souls. Its as if the person walked away from Moore street thinking totally of Christ, and not of the person they were just talking to and who gave them the miraculous medal. Even the entire Magnificat is a praise of God. Thank God for the miraculous medals then, because God can do through Mary what I cannot do. But its all made possible because of humility, through which God can work unhindered on the soul.

Amen.

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