



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Heart of our faith: the person Jesus Christ

Let us never be distracted from what is the heart of our faith, a person, Jesus Christ. Because so many efforts are made to get us away from him Our Saviour.

People get embroiled in issues which often distract from the central. That is one of the pluses of Pope Francis: he centres on Christ. Many current debates or chat shows get embroiled in issues: the hierarchical structure of the church, its organisation, the role of women or the laity, its finances, personalities, its history, its scandals. But none of this has any true context unless Jesus Christ is centre. Indeed only one thing matters: Christ our Lord who loves us and cares for us.

Our central task then is to proclaim Jesus and what he means for us. And we have to sell him not as a historical figure of the past or a great teacher or a miracle worker, but as that wonderful person who came from God among us to show us God's love and commitment to us including his understanding of our human weakness and to speak of the hope he gives as the one who suffered a miserable death for our sins but who is now alive and risen. And because he is risen he is with us and helping us all on life's journey.

In Lent and Eastertide especially we will have a chance to reflect on the central events in his life and death and risen life. Let us use it to get to know him better ourselves.

He is the one who did not shrink from sharing the worst that life can send, from poor origins in the manger at Bethlehem to that dreadful end on the Cross, or seeming end. He showed us how to live poverty, the hidden life, the living and proclaiming of values, especially the value of deep respect and love and care for every human being. He gave us a most outstanding example of a how to carry with dignity great suffering, how to continue to love in the midst of rejection and pain and how to bow to God in complete trust and abandonment. And as I said there is the hope that despite the worst the God of love has a wonderful reward for us if we stay the journey with Jesus.

It is this person and all he is and all he can mean for us and do for us, most especially his forgiving love, that is the heart of what we stand for and proclaim. And especially in our Mass it is this person we are centring on because in the Mass we again hear his word to us and we unite ourselves with his life, death and Resurrection in the central act of the Mass. By means of the consecration the Risen Lord comes to us with his sacrifice on the Cross. And he comes so that we can all develop a personal intimate relationship with him for the good of our inner spirits and the building up in us of energy to become like him.

And now we come to where we become effective or not. Because it will be of no real benefit to proclaim Jesus if he is not somehow changing us. It is easy to give lip service to religion. Often it can become something in the head, like nice thoughts and ideas and grand visions and ideals. Many a person who has spoken well of the Gospel has failed to



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actually live it. If Jesus is that great person who brings great values and love and who teaches the best way to heaven then it has to be proven in our own lives. There is no point in saying that Jesus saves unless you can say, “Here is what he did for me; here is how he makes the difference. In fact I want to tell what he did for me, how he helped me and why I am the person I am today.”

And that again is why Lent is a time of grace. It is a season in which above everything else Christ must grow in me and I become more like him. Because the more like him I am, the more I let him change me, the better I will be able to proclaim the faith to others.

There is a sense in which I have to become a Sacrament of Christ. The Catechism says that sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to human nature (1084). By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit they make effectively present the grace they signify. The latin word Sacrament comes from the Greek Mysterion. St. Augustines says that there is no other mystery of God except Christ. Christ is the mystery or sign of God being united with the human family (774). That is why we can also call the Church a sacrament. But it is also why we must become sacraments: signs of the reality of Christ. Each of us has to become a being bearing Christ in us.

Central to what a sacrament is is the harmony between word and deed. If we are all words and no good works as St. James says we will fail as sacraments. Equally if we are good people who are altruistic but with no reference to Christ we cannot be sacraments. We must become what we preach and we must proclaim the great things God has done for us.

Mary did not turn up at Elizabeth’s house simply pregnant with Jesus. She spoke out her joy. “For he who is mighty has done great things for me!” As Lent begins let us deepen with the help of her prayers our life in Christ and let us witness by word but even more by the Christ-like people we are the mystery of Christ to all around us.

Amen.

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