



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Witnessing with Joy

The Pope's letter *Evangelii Gaudium* has got a lot of publicity. However it requires a closer look and study if its inner power is to be tapped into. Tonight I plan only to look at certain aspects of it which I hope may be of help.

“The great danger of today's world . . . is the desolation and anguish born of complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunt conscience. Wherever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt and the desire to do good fades.” That is the sad state many fall into and how well he describes it. John of the Cross wrote something similar nearly 5 centuries ago (*Ascent of Mount Carmel I*). We can ask what really rules us? Money, my bank account? I close my door on the world and on God. That as the Pope says is no way to live a dignified life.

So he invites us to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ every day, Jesus who is always waiting for us. Meeting Jesus gives us a new horizon and a decisive direction in life. And like the disciples on the lake he invites us into his project and gives us new life.

The hallmark of someone who has really found Jesus is joy. It comes from a deep sense of being infinitely loved. Because that is what the heart of the Gospel is saying to us, that God revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ. Insofar as we imbibe that it liberates us from narrowness and self-absorption. The more we sense God loving us the more we want to share that with others. If we want to live a dignified and fulfilled life we have to reach out to others. Let me quote a few words that will make sense to you. “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed those who enjoy life most are those who leave the security of the shore and become excited by the commission of communicating life to others . . .” That is what happened for the disciples (Mt 4: 18 - 22).

And that is our mission, to share the good news of God's love with others. And the Pope makes a definite point from the start: we do that mostly by the kind of people we are, by how we respond to people, not by anything we say, although that helps at times. I think the Pope is using his humour when he says that “There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter” or when he says, “An evangeliser must not look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!” “May the world of our time which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelisers who are dejected, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ.”

Before he ascended into Heaven Jesus sent the disciples, “Go forth and make disciples of the nations!” All of us are called to go forth. That is the *Ita Missa est* which gives us the word Mass. And we are asked to leave our comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel. Not Mission Impossible!

The peripheries are not just the physical ones like the shanty towns or the outback. It can be the drop outs and the addicts whom you know so well. But it can be the lost young generation, it can be the fear of the sick and dying, it can be those who are not poor but whose life is just a get from one day to the next with no meaning.

The Pope is clear: everyone needs to hear the joyful Gospel. And he says to us in encouragement, “God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as a farmer sleeps. The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.” In other words, like the Prophet Isaiah, the Pope is saying not to be afraid to share the Word of God because the word that



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goes forth from my mouth does not come back to me empty handed but like the rain and the snow which fall from heaven help achieve that for which I sent it (Is 55: 10 - 11). So let us not be afraid to share it but go forth in fidelity to the example of our master and bring his word to all places, occasions, without reluctance or hesitation or fear. “The joy of the Gospel is for all people no one can be excluded.”

The Pope calls us to take first steps. “Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved”. Involved by word and deed with people’s daily lives, we bridge distances, embrace human life, touch the suffering flesh of Christ in others. And I like this bit too: “An evangelising community is supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be . . . Evangelisation consist mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time . . . It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the gain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bears fruits of new life . . .”

One final reflection for now. The Pope asks for a Church with open doors. He is sad to hear of places where the building is not open to those who want to go in and pray. But he says there are other doors that should not be closed either. The door of baptism is not to be closed to people; it is the door to all the life of the Church. The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. The Church is not a toll-house; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone with all their problems (Jn 2: 13ss).

So again he calls us to go out and offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. And he adds: “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security”. When you have done your best to share Christ and have suffered nothing but rejection remember these words.

Amen.

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