



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Prayer.

I was struck a few days ago when I saw, waiting to cross a road, several people, all with earphones stuck in and they all seemed to be glued to whatever they were listening to. Our lives, compared to our fore-fathers, are full of noise. The radio wakes people up, more TV and radio at breakfast, car radio or ear phones on the way into work, the noise and distractions of work, more noise on the way home, evenings TV. It takes us away from ourselves, from others, from nature and the real world around us. And I think of someone who ends up in hospital who might have no such distractions and may get depressed, not just due to the drugs they are on but due to the fact that they are by themselves for the first time.

Last week I decided to go down to a monastery and spend some time away. And I decided that as I drove out of Dublin to leave off the radio. I was tired when I got there and wondered what I was doing. But only for a while. One good night's sleep, having had no distractions, and I was suddenly with the Lord.

But maybe over the years I have become used to the silence and love it. Mother Teresa once said (well maybe many times) that souls of prayer are souls of great silence. In silence you run into the raw. Your raw self! Who am I really? What was I made to be or to do? Has my life any value? Am I making the best of it? Am I in the wrong place and should I be elsewhere? What is the point of it all?

But in the silence you may hear some answers. Yes, you have a value. You would not be here if you did not (have a value and purpose). Bring peace to your soul and find a calm place. There you will see more clearly. If you are a bit off course don't worry. You will hear the Lord saying, "I have my eye on you and there is nothing in your life that is beyond redeeming. Who you really are will only be revealed to you in the future. Trust the mystery of it all. When your way is not too clear, when you are in a fog, then identify the things you must do and do them well, leave the bigger picture to me". Remember John Henry Newman: one step enough for me; lead kindly light amid the encircling doom.

For those who love noise silence can be very threatening. Being on your own can be very frightening for someone. But unless we create silence we cannot provide a way for God to speak to us as he wants.

St. Patrick found his kidnap and enslavement in Ireland a trial. But in that silence of Slieve Mish with only sheep and pigs to mind he began to communicate with the only other being around: God. Initially his prayers may have been the vocal ones he remembered. His father had been a deacon so he would have known something of God. But in that captivity of silence he became very receptive to God. And sometimes in strange ways, in any of our lives, God may use what appears a disaster to knock on our door and



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take us a road we never expected and maybe even initially resent. How many people have learnt that?

It seems that when Jesus went out to the desert he did so under the gentle movement of the Holy Spirit. He went to where he had silence. Away from the pressures of life, away from the talk that centred around events. Away from his comfort zones. And there he encountered the world of the Spirit and the world of the holy angels and the devil. The Holy Spirit led him, the evil spirit tempted him, the angels ministered to him. Real prayer leads you to the spirit world.

The Gospels connect the baptism of Jesus with the forty days in the desert. At the Jordan the Spirit descended on him and then led him into the desert. In a way by going to the Jordan Jesus already left the world behind and went to semi desert. Where the Baptist was. There too he heard something of who he was. "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!" Every meeting with God helps us establish our identity. But we must first create a silence in which God can speak to us and tell us who we are.

I mentioned that in prayer too we might hear a call of God. Prayer too can be a place where the malicious spirit tries to mislead us. Jesus had the strength to see through his wiles. We might be tempted in prayer to imagine God calling us to be great crusaders and take on the world and make a mark in it. But for whom? "Throw yourself off the Temple and they'll all fall down before you". Ah yes, how often it is our own glory we seek. As Jesus says on Ash Wednesday "They only say their prayers and do their penances and almsgiving so that men may see them!" When Jesus cast out the demon from the man in the graves what did he say to him? "Go home to your own people and just tell them how good God has been to you! Your task is not to be a trumpet blower!"

Anyone who really wants to take prayer seriously needs a spiritual director because of the risks of the bad spirit. Get out the stupid ideas, the dangerous temptations, deflate the pride. Run it by someone else occasionally.

But just as for Jesus the silence helped him (as in Gethsemane too) so it will help us. One of the great blessings of prayer is peace. The noise of the world is just so disturbing and distracting. It is similar in our spiritual lives to the light pollution that prevents us seeing the stars, a work of God. The word of God cannot get through into our hearts in the midst of clutter as the parable of the Sower reminds us. But in the calm of silence we can begin to see the priorities and also the shallowness and slowly turn our lives to something of value or maybe help us attend to work and relationships with a better standard and quality.

I simply encourage you, as we approach Lent, to think of cutting out some of the noise that blocks God out and create spaces where God can speak to you.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill