



Allocutio



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Allocutio: St. Ann gave Mary confidence

A problem we have been suffering as a Church recently is a lack of confidence. We had a way and style of dealing with religion in the past which befitted a certain era, an era in which we had to struggle with persecution, a lack of the things of this world, and a world that hadn't to deal with science and communications. Along came the world of plenty, the world of television, the world of a younger people more educated than their parents, the world of science, and all of a sudden many parents and teachers hadn't the answers to cope. But there was also the problem of morals. On the one hand some bishops and priests were exposed as not living as morally as they should be and on the other hand the media were presenting a new way of living that allowed just about anything provided it didn't hurt others, at least not obviously.

And this has undermined confidence. We hear criticism of Church leaders as being too afraid. Or if one speaks out we find many people coming along to criticise what was said because what was said didn't really help certain cases or it wasn't based on the facts or even that the tone was all wrong. And it doesn't help that the media report only certain things and will keep a deadly silence over others. All of this has sown doubt and a lack of confidence.

It seems to me that we would do well to turn to Our Lady and St. Ann and ask them for help in this. Because if ever there was someone in the life of the Church who displayed confidence it had to be Our Lady. She has the neck to go and visit her kinswoman Elizabeth as soon as she hears that Elizabeth is in her 6th month. And see the confident joy with which she greets Elizabeth and proclaims the Glory of God. And who is the real boss when she meets the twelve year old Jesus after his sojourn of three days in the temple at Jerusalem. And who has the guts and confidence to get Jesus to carry out his first miracle in Cana? Where did she get it all?

You don't have to be a genius to know that a child's self-confidence depends greatly on how it is reared by the parents. That great self-assurance and confidence of Mary speaks volumes of her own parents. Children get a lot of self confidence by being encouraged. So we cannot be wrong when we say that St. Ann is someone who instilled a great self-confidence in Our Lady. And that can only mean that she was full of the Holy Spirit herself. Oh Yes, Our Lady will say that God gets the credit. True; but grace works with nature and the work of giving self-confidence to children does dovetail with grace. So let us see the hand of St. Ann in Mary's confidence.

Why did Jesus say so often, "Do not be afraid?" Why did John Paul II say it too? They knew we have to replace our fears and doubts and lack of confidence with something different. Fear got the man of the one talent to hide it in the ground and gain nothing. But he did have a talent as you and I have! Fear got the apostles to run and hide like scared rabbits. But there is a Mary and St. John in all of us that can stand beside the other suffering members of Christ at the foot of the Cross! What are we missing? The Holy Spirit got the others to find courage and to proclaim their faith confidently before the world. John the Baptist realised that it is the Holy Spirit who gives the Church that confidence it needs to bring the message of salvation to the world and that is why he said to his disciples, "I have baptised you with water but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit." And that same Spirit was in Mary. It enabled her to both be mother to Christ and to stand beside him to the end.

We need to get our confidence back. We have been knocked by scandals and the communications revolution that

seems to leave us without answers or at least unsure of ourselves. But in all of this we are in the same place the disciples were after Jesus death: knocked by the scandal of his cross, having no answers to the taunts of enemies and reeling under the blows of our own sins and betrayals.

Just right there we run into another cause of our lack of confidence: our sins. They do cause us to doubt. You make a good confession, you resolve to turn to a better way, you seem all cleaned up, you last strong a few hours, perhaps a few days or weeks and then you fall back into your old habits of flesh or heart or mind. And your confidence is knocked! Self-doubt floods your soul. And you let yourself go.

If St. Ann, as I suggest, is the one who helped build up at a natural level the sense of confidence that dwelt in Mary, then we must pray to her for the same gift. Do we in the Legion ever think that she who is Our Lady's mother does not care for her daughter's friends? Let us ask her to win for us by her prayers a faith in her grandson which will make us strong and confident as a rock. He is there already waiting at the door of our hearts, knocking gently, wanting us to open our hearts to him and to make him our friend. And he wants to come to us to help us know him, to love him and then to bring him to others. May we have the confidence to do so.

Each day my friends I try to find one hour of time to spend before him in the Blessed Sacrament and I find that this helps me to have a vision, to have energy and to not be embarrassed or afraid about my faith. And I am saying to you that you must pray and find space for God too. If you pray you begin to let the Holy Spirit work in you. That is how it was with St. Ann. The Holy Spirit will give you and me new life and confidence. Anybody who really tries to be in touch with real God in prayer and who is humble and generous in the time they give to prayer will be helped by the Holy Spirit to grow in their confidence about God and his ways. It is why I congratulate those of you who do give time here to pray before the Blessed Sacrament and why I encourage more of you to do it.

I have been struck by, dare I put it this way, by the audacity of Barak Obama. Where does he get his confidence? I would not be surprised if it came from his mother who had great love for him and encouraged him time and time again saying, "Yes you can!" And think of the love of the mother of the Cure D'Ars for her son. So too for Mary.

Yes, we can change the church around. Yes we can make the Gospel real and of relevance for this time and for the younger people. Yes we can overcome our sins. Anybody who is brave enough to pray, anyone who is brave enough to confront their sins and keep battling despite falling many times by going to confession and renewing their efforts, anybody whom God sees is persevering, that soul God will come to and make a special friend of. St. Ann prayed and gained a great calm and confidence about God which she passed on to Mary. Through her prayers may we all become Christians of great confidence.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill