



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Prayers to Our Lady

I was just thinking about some of the prayers we say to Our Lady. The Hail Holy Queen, the Memorare, the Hail Mary and other prayers we are familiar with. And I wondered what is the best and what might Our Lady herself like?

I must say I like the Salve Regina. It is a prayer we say at the end of Compline and also at funerals. It does have the value of greeting Our Lady. "Hail Holy Queen, Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope." It does refer to this world as a valley of tears, a vale of suffering through which the sons and daughters of Eve must live in exile. And we ask her, after our exile, to show us what we so seek: sight at last of her Son, Jesus. And we ask her by her prayer to make us worthy of the promises of Christ. It is then a prayer that is suitable to funerals and since going to bed and sleep may be a rehearsal, or in some cases not just a rehearsal but the final act, it is not inappropriate to say at night. I like it when sung in Latin.

It does put the emphasis somewhat on our poor state, a people in trouble, in suffering and certainly is not inappropriate when we feel down.

But I wonder if the Memorare seems more suited when you are in trouble. We plead, "Never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection ..." This is the prayer of a desperate child turning to its mother for help. Just as a child has confidence in its mother's ability to solve some problem so we turn to Mary in confidence and put our requests before her.

These prayers have their place. They seem to come from a place in which we are in difficulty. They seem to emphasise our desperate plight: poor banished children of Eve: sighing, mourning, weeping in this valley of tears, in exile. We are in need of protection, imploring her help, seeking her intercession. We come before her as sinful and sorrowful. We ask her not to despise our prayers. And certainly there can be moments in our lives when we have our back to the wall and then they do give us the words we need to express how we feel. They are words of a certain emotion.

But I have the sense too that like children they could be an expression of a certain self centred focus. They could become selfish prayers in which the focus is my misery. And they might also reflect a broken bowed people. Ochon, ochon, wisha wisha! We'll all be ruined if she doesn't do something for us. Yet I do not think that Mary wants to hear that tone from her children!

The Memorare too seems to carry a note of blackmail in it. Never was it known! In other words we could be saying, "Listen, you have a great reputation; so are you going to blow it now? You will if you don't answer me. Your reputation is at stake!" Well hopefully not. I presume we are coming to her because we are inspired by her reputation. It is because of her reputation that we have confidence and are lifting our heads and will have then fully lifted when she answers our prayers.

So let us turn now to the Hail Mary. Its tone is totally different. But it has to since its first part is made up of two greetings to her, that of the angel and that of St. Elizabeth. The focus is not on us and our plight but on Our Lady and who she is. It's like we went up to someone and said, "It's great to meet you. I'm delighted to hear how well you are doing. What a joy to meet you. You are a joy for us all." Just think of the words of the Hail Mary. Let me give a slightly different version but I am not attempting to undo the angel or St. Elizabeth, just to help you grasp what I'm getting at. "Hi Mary. You are really a bright light, the brightest. God has to be with you. You are the greatest of all women and what a guy you have there in your womb!"



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Okay let's stick to the Words of Scripture but I just want you to think of how different in their meaning, aim and tone they are to the other prayers. But they are heavenly words and reflect more the correct relationship we should have with Our Lady. In the Hail Mary she is not a problem solver or a favour dispenser. Our focus is to recognise her in herself for whom she is. It is then an unselfish prayer from our side. It is also a prayer of joy and delight about her.

Yes, its second part contains some words of request. "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." They are direct words that say simply that we need her prayers but don't go on and on. In some ways they reflect what Our Lord said later about praying: don't heap up empty words, don't say many words. The simple request for her prayers contains words of confidence in her who is the Queen of Heaven. Like the Centurian who said "Just say the word" our mood is one of unwavering faith. Just put in the word for us, Mary.

So I suppose what I am saying is that the Hail Mary still remains the most outstanding of all the prayers we can offer to Our Lady. We greet her, the Queen of Heaven, with joy and delight, recognising who she is and we simply and confidently ask her prayers.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill