



# Allocutio



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## Allocutio: Courage

St. Patrick had great courage. His courage was human for he had to deal with real human fears which included fear of imprisonment and harsh treatment and even death. "I heard my mission abused, I endured many persecutions even to the extent of chains, ... should I be worthy I am ready to give even my life". But it was also a courage based on a very deep sense of God's love for him. And this gave him a strength that normal human courage cannot give. He carried with him a deep peace convinced that God loved him and so all would be well. And so he tells us, "Let me tell you briefly how the merciful God often saved me from slavery and; how he rescued me twelve times when my life was in danger as well as the numerous conspiracies which I cannot recount".

These words tell us he hadn't it easy. It took courage to leave Slieve Mish and escape to the Southeast and get to France. It took courage to come back to Ireland and begin preaching the Gospel. It took courage to face the leaders of his day and draw the youth to Christ. Then out of the blue he was accused of something from his youth which was meant to discredit him. That too was a Cross.

But because he trusted God and knew God was with him he had energy to face all these trials and continue. And it is clear from his Confessions that he received great consolations from God. People did accept the Gospel, young people followed him becoming monks and priests and nuns. But he took no pride in his success. God had first humbled him and left him handicapped in many ways. So at the end he says, "Let you conclusion and the general opinion rather be the real truth: that my success was the gift of God". He acknowledges then that he had success but it was God's doing.

We need courage in our Irish Church today. I admired the strong statement of Archbishop Nicholls and Bishop Smith last Sunday in England. They would not have been appreciated by some but once said so many people came out in support because they said what is the truth: Marriage is between a man and a woman and is impossible for same sex couples. There is a world of a difference between two men or two women who can never produce offspring and the heterosexual couple who can produce offspring. That is what marriage is about and what it is for. And that is God's reality as he made his creation.

When St. Patrick came to Ireland he had to deal with a pagan system of thought and values and it was not easy to challenge a whole system. He seems to have won the youth but struggled with the older generation. Those legends about him taking on Crom Cruach or lighting the fire at Slane before the King at Tara lit the Bealtaine fire are all trying to tell us about that challenging of a pagan society.

St. Patrick wasn't against the Irish. What he did was bring a dose of God's reality to us. And at the heart of that message was a call to have a deep faith in a God who loves us and is always with us. He personally witnessed to that himself. Indeed he would never have returned if he did not believe he was supported and loved by this God. And if he were here today he'd challenge us about the false idols we have gone after and ask us to again replace them with a deep faith in the God of love who sent his Son Jesus among us. He would see the modern sad reality of suicide among the young as a reflection of a society in which God's love and its proclamation has diminished. He would see the many forms of modern anxiety as another reflection of a diminishing of prayer.

He strongly advocated perseverance and not giving up. The world God made, including us humans, is not perfect but Patrick would say that by persevering in faith with life you'll get there. That is often our problem, that we become discouraged and abandon projects. While there are pockets of evil here and there in fact there is an innate goodness in people. And in his own life too he proved that because while



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he speaks of so many threats to his life he was in fact never killed perhaps reflecting something in our character even to today: a certain decency among us. I have grown too to realise that. But the more we come to God who made us all and come to see everyone as another child of God a positive attitude grows in our hearts towards one another.

Let me end with a small quote from him which I think does reflect his faith and the faith he brought to us and a faith we need to recover today: "I daily expect to be murdered or robbed or reduced to slavery in one way or another. Not that I fear any of these things. Because of his promises I leave myself in the hands of Almighty God who rules everywhere. As the prophet says, Unload your burden on the Lord and he will support you". Maybe with him we might take those words to heart and unload on the Lord whatever that burden is and gain courage from the God who is always on our side in life.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill