



Allocutio



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Allocutio: The Mystery in the Cross

Even if you leave God out and say “There is no God” you are left with a problem. For there is the mystery of this whole universe. What is it doing there? We look at that photo of planet earth, the little dot of faint blue against the background of the Sun’s glare taken by the Voyager spacecraft, and you see how small we are. You look out with Hubble or the Vast Array telescope in Chile and you see those enormous distances and the time span. And when they get the next generation telescopes up into space or on the Andean hills we suspect it will get even bigger and more questions will be left and fewer answers.

We are part of some mystery. We enter this world already there and we leave it to others. There is always the mystery of my conception and birth to certain parents at a given moment in history. Growth seems to happen, progress is made even in short steps and then decline. And then my time comes to an end. Why? What is it all about?

And in the middle of it all are our interpersonal relationships of love, expectation, hopes and disappointments and betrayals. What is this strange commerce between humans, sometimes inspiring, other times depressing?

Jesus is going to his death. He has read very well the signs of his times. The mystery has ordained this for him. He too is going to be severely challenged by the mystery. “Father, will I say take me from this hour? No, for that is why I came!” What happened on the Mount of the Transfiguration is first for him before it is for us. It is the great mystery behind the Universe reassuring him as he hands himself over to suffering and death that there is good outcome. It is not pointless. Now it is true also that the mysterious event of the Transfiguration was also to help the disciples who would be shattered by what was coming, to give them some glimmer to hold onto in their moment of almost nothingness. But first it is a reassurance for Jesus himself so that he could go forward and entrust himself in faith to the mystery that he will experience.

I have mentioned what we could call the macro mystery, the mystery of a Universe already there in which we barely deserve to be called pixels of the Universe. We really are so small. But there is also the mystery of suffering and pain we experience very personally. It might be a cancer, declining health, it might be relationships gone wrong and misunderstandings that flatten us.

Christ was also revealing to us humans that behind what we appear to be, with these limited and declining bodies, with memory deficiencies and proneness to illness, there is a new life already growing. By the transfiguration he was trying to encourage the disciples. He is saying that through the trials and struggles of life, most especially when we seem to suffer failure or injustice, a new life is growing beneath the surface, the life of the new homeland to which we are moving, that is behind the mystery.



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We can even go a step further. As life and its trials mould us and shape us we are being ever changed. Our journey into the mystery is not just physical, it is more a spiritual journey. So even in this life at a deeper level than the physical do we not speak of where you feel more at home and less at home.

I often wonder about that first reading if in fact Abraham in his old age was just having a psychotic moment. That too is very challenging. The mysteries of our minds are still a great challenge to science. But into that space too the great Mystery of the Universe can speak and lead. We pray that all those bent on a destructive path for others may hear that voice calling them to preserve life and not kill it, to do only good and to avoid evil, to learn to live in peace with themselves and others.

The event of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac has always been seen as a prototype of the sacrifice yet to come when God gave up his Son on Calvary. There another aspect of mystery shows itself, the mystery of unjust suffering and the pain of the innocent ones. In the Transfiguration we are given an assurance ahead of its happening that the pettiness of men cannot prevent the vindication of the just. The unfolding mystery has a good outcome already happening. And that too is the message of the Resurrection. Later the Risen Lord will say, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter his glory!"

Abraham was willing to kill his son in trust of that great mystery. He was spared. But his act also points to another dimension of the mystery, namely that God himself allowed his only begotten Son to run the gauntlet of death and be annihilated by those he was sent to help. Was God hurt and offended by the wrong done? God who is the mystery allows himself partake too in the process because he knows it is necessary and is the only way to a good outcome. God has a safety net in place.

When we celebrate Mass we are entering into this great cosmic mystery. It is centered on the death of a good and just man who did not deserve to be so treated. It is centered on the happy outcome of his triumph. At Mass we celebrate the great act of entrustment of Jesus to the mystery, to the plan that is unfolding and in his triumph we are given hope for our own partaking in the mystery.

When our own time comes and we know we are drawing to our end in this world may we have the grace to simply entrust ourselves to the mystery and not fight it. There are many signs about, like the Transfiguration, hinting that the mystery is benevolent and that we should go into it in great peace.

"Lord, I know my life is not always as it should be. I know I have sinned and wasted many opportunities you gave me. Still I entrust myself to the mystery of your love and mercy. I may have got some things wrong but you know my sincerity and efforts. Let me go now and may you, the God of surprises, surprise me."

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill



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