



Allocutio



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Allocutio: St. John the Evangelist.

He is one of the great patrons of the Legion because, like St. Joseph he is closely associated with the Blessed Virgin. Joseph looked after her (and she him) in her earlier life; John looked after her after Jesus death (and she him too). We see them at her side in the vision of Knock. They are both invoked at the end of the opening prayers of the Legion.

John's Gospel, like that of St. Luke, makes many references to Our Lady. But the first Chapter of his Gospel, although it doesn't appear so obvious, is an image of the first Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. Many artists have painted the scene of the Angel Gabriel appearing to Mary at the Annunciation after St. John the Baptist has been conceived. On close analysis the same pattern appears in John but seen from a different angle. After mentioning the Baptist John writes "The Word was made flesh... full of grace and truth". Is this not the x-ray of the Annunciation, the image that tells us the truth beneath the surface: God is with us? Mary has conceived the second person of the Blessed Trinity. And artists who paint the annunciation scene often try to convey also the image of a scene full of grace and truth.

If we go on in the same chapter we come to the Jordan. There John is baptising. And it is there John the Evangelist presents us with the Baptist pointing to Jesus and saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world". Just as at the Visitation John the Baptist witnessed to Elizabeth that the Saviour was among us so John the Baptist again witnesses to others that Jesus is the promised redeemer. The promise is being fulfilled; Elizabeth saw it clearly. And Andrew and Philip also witness: we have found the Messiah. So John the Evangelist parallels Luke in his first Chapter giving us a different perspective on the realities occurring.

It is clear that the Evangelist John came to know Mary early on. He alone gives us the graphic details of Our Lord's first miracle, carried out almost on the incitement of Our Lady. And after the wedding we are told that they all went down to Capernaum, Mary, the disciples and Jesus. Already a bond was building up.

What is so clear is that John was the disciple who came closest to Mary. He stood by her at the Cross. In a way he is the disciple who is the model of Legionary members. He makes a place for her in his home and we must do the same. Close to Mary and learning so much from her about her Son.

I was down in Knock recently and praying in the Shrine. I was looking across at the three Statues and noting the positions and poses of the three. And it came into my head that John was the one Apostle who did not suffer the red martyrdom. He was not killed but died. Of course Christians have always seen this as proper because unlike the others he



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had already partaken in a death experience at the foot of the Cross. That was his deep martyrdom.

But standing by Our Lady in this image something else came to me, that those who keep close to Mary are given a special protection. She looks after them as a good mother. We who offer ourselves to her service and who become her friends will have the special protection she has the power of obtaining for us from heaven. The worst will never happen to us. She will save us from the fires of hell.

But even if he didn't die a blood martyr's death John did suffer. Obviously at the foot of the Cross. But there is also a tradition that an attempt was made to kill him by throwing him into burning oil. And that he was preserved from martyrdom. As I glanced at the image in Knock I could not help but also think of Mary's words to Bernadette, "I do not promise to make you happy in this world". It seems to me that if we belong to Mary we must share in some way in suffering as she did, our hearts being wounded with a sword but we will still survive and be the better for it. We must all suffer belonging to her Son. But we will also be saved in her shadow.

The end result however will be the fruit we bear. In the image of Knock John is seen holding a Gospel and it clearly points to his own great insight into Jesus and his mystery. And I believe that all who stay with Mary and keep close to her will produce great fruit in some form. John the Evangelist wrote about this. Just read Chapter 15 of his Gospel where he records Our Lord asking us to come even closer to him so that we can bear fruit in plenty.

St. John then is a model for us all, someone who gave a real space to Mary in his life and as a result produced a work of great depth, one that has inspired people even beyond the Christian fold. We would all do well to do as he did and make a place for her in the home of our hearts.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill