



Allocutio



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Allocutio: The Incarnation and the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

We are coming to that time of year again when we celebrate the birth of Christ. But it always presupposes the event of the Incarnation because no child is born who is not first conceived. So let us today reflect on the Incarnation.

In fact that is the extraordinary event that challenges all our normal presuppositions about God and man. Who is God that he can become one with this world and what is man that God can become one with him? And indeed there are other strange consequences in that God, by adopting human nature has also adopted to himself the whole of creation. Because the human body is fashioned from the dust of the earth and the same chemicals that house us in our bodies housed the Word from the first moment of the Incarnation. This dimension of creation, namely that it is at God's service, is reflected in the Collect of the Feast of the King when we pray, "Grant we pray that the whole creation, set free from slavery, may render your majesty service and ceaselessly proclaim your praise".

What is God? Who is God? We can look about at the whole of the known Universe and wonder at the size and plan of it all and wonder at the great God behind it. And yet in that tiny embryo in the fallopian tubes of Mary lies the second Person of the Blessed Trinity who was beside the Father as he sparked off the creation, something still beyond the reach of the scientists. Who is this God who became humbler yet, making himself as all men are, and even going humbler to accept freely death on the Cross? We can at least say this for certain namely that when he created the Universe it was done in such a way that spirit could live in it and grow and express itself which is a wonder in itself when we think of the myriad of forms of life and what they can do but even more that it open to God himself being able to unite himself to it and also express himself in and through it.

Another thing the Incarnation signals is not just that in the static now does God become one with creation and humanity but he does so with an object in mind, namely some event in the future. You could for example use the image of a pilot who comes out in a launch to step on a large ship to help steer it into port. And Jesus has come to help us negotiate our ways forward into heaven. The use of that image of the pilot bringing a ship into port may evoke the thought that just as this happens when a long journey is nearing its end than maybe the long journey of history is in astronomical terms nearing the end of its journey? But we leave that with God and stay with what is before us.

The Incarnation raises the huge issue of the relationship between spirit and matter. God takes the clay of the earth and breaths into it the breadth of life. There are those short-sighted scientists who want to reduce life and spirit to some function of matter itself and say that it can all be reduced to some expression of matter already in it. But when you look at matter it seems to behave very predictably and measurably. We can tell to a fraction of a millimetre where the moon will be in a million days. We can project the sky forward to 20,000 years from now and tell where each star will appear in the sky. But a hundred years ago no one would have projected the reality of the Voyager spacecraft. The spirit living in humans changed that dimension of the



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skies. And likewise the coming of Jesus altered history and will continue to alter it and direct it onwards.

The Incarnation also has serious implications for our spirituality. There was a time when some said that matter was bad, that the flesh was bad. But God by becoming one with both the atoms and molecules of our world has clearly said not so. If Jesus can allow bread and wine to be transformed into his Body and Blood clearly he is saying that these are excellent things capable of being divinised in some way. If Jesus could be hungry and tired then such things are not so the antithesis of God that God abhors them. Indeed Jesus shipped much pain and so has purified it in some way. No it is not matter that is bad. Rather there is a defect in the human spirit that can cause things made to be of service to God go wrong and thus pull them down.

The Incarnation occurred to help undo this defect in spirit and to restore the spiritual so that in its contact with matter, in its occupation of matter made to help spirit, all things would be directed to the real ends for which they were made. Evil is the absence of the good that should be there as St. Thomas Aquinas said. So evil thwarts matter and its purpose, and e.g. damages the seas with pollution or stabs the knife into the heart so that life is prematurely ended in that creature, etc. The Incarnation is about helping the spiritual in the Universe to be corrected and set upon a healthier path so that it uses matter better and communicates through matter in a better way to others.

It is not alone that the Great Spiritual Being of all, namely God, connects to the matter he made, but he also comes to connect with the spiritual in the Universe. He united himself to a human body and also a human soul. He comes to touch all that is life and all that has heart and to raise it to a better level. But if we resist? We must trust him and allow him in life to challenge our spirits and to make them grow to be life-giving and life-enabling and not life-inhibiting or life-snatching.

But just for tonight I come to one other consideration of the Incarnation. It has to do with that sacred Place where this great act of connection took place. Yes in a human being as the height of all that is created, as the prime among all embodied spirits. As I say the connection happened to help heal a defect in spirit so the place of entry had to be a place where the spirit was also special. And that was the significance of the Immaculate Conception. The Immaculate Conception of Mary was to facilitate the Incarnation and prepare the place of entry for the divine being. He had to begin in absolutely perfect spiritual ground. Just as we prepare earth to receive crops that will grow and bear fruit, so the Incarnation had to take place in a sinless breast as we say. Without Mary conceived without sin the Saviour could not have come. She is God's work and not her own effort. But for us all he prepared her and kept her free from all sin from the first moment of her existence. As we say in Irish *Tusach maith leath na hoibre*. That is why she is called the morning star, the dawn. She is in the history of humanity a most special person and a most special event. It is no wonder the Church and the world and heaven itself regards her as special, why we say, "You are the highest honour of our race!".

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill