



Allocutio



Presentata Curia 26th November 2015

Allocutio: True Christmas.

In the Book of the Maccabees (See 1 Macc 4:36-59 for the full text. See also 2 Macc 10) we are told that after Judas and his brothers had cleared Judea of those who had defiled the Temple a project was begun to restore the Temple. This involved clearing out all those plants that had grown up in it as you'd see in an old ruin. They also got rid of the stones that had made up the desecrated altar and put them aside until some prophet would help them to know what best to do with them. They set about redecorating the place. They built a new altar. And finally they rededicated the Temple in 164 B.C.

Let me quote: "Early in the morning of the 25th day of the month, which is the month of Chislev, ... they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offerings which they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and lutes and cymbals. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days. ... They decorated the front of the Temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates. There was great gladness among the people ... Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of the dedication of the altar would be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth of the month of Chislev".

The Jewish month of Chislev corresponds somewhat to our December. So this joyful Jewish feast beginning on the 25th of Chislev and lasting 8 days corresponds to our celebration of Christmas and the New Year. By the time Jesus was born the Jews used put candles in doorways and used to decorate their houses with branches. The holly and the ivy and the lighted Christmas Candle all have their origin in this feast of Hanukkah beginning on the 25th of the month.

But I want you to think a bit more deeply with me about what this event might say to us. It is about the restoration of the Temple. And boy, do we need some form of restoration! Just like those times of old, Christmas has been taken over by foreign agents and business. It is no longer about the beautiful event by which God united himself to our world and especially human beings and came to lift us from the spiritual and moral morass we had fallen into. In some ways it is more a case that it has become an occasion of falling back to that morass.

Here is our challenge: to restore the beauty of Christmas to its original meaning. Like Judas Maccabaeus we must somehow rededicate Christmas. And for that reason I think there is something great about our Rosary before the Crib in O'Connell Street when we focus on what the event is about: God has come to share our life and to bring us out of sin into a good clean path.

It may be worthwhile each praesidium reflecting about how we can all help restore Christmas to its purer meaning and how we can give a joyful witness to this. If we put our



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heads together on this and keep at it we could change society and restore the original good of Christmas. The focus must be that beautiful truth the world actually wants to hear: God loves us and has come among us as our brother to help us.

Of course the place we must start above all is in our own hearts and dispositions. It is not just about getting Christmas superficially back into Christmas cards or making sure those Merry Xmas signs go or decorating somewhere with an attractive crib to outdo some Santa scene in a shop window. We do well to achieve that but the authentic restoration of Christmas must involve a search to grasp the deeper meaning of that staggering event: God is among his people.

On our own we could be lone evangelists, interpreted as extremists. But we have the blessed gift of the Legion of Mary, brothers and sisters with us, to help us all together to confront this great challenge of our times.

Another sad sign, as I see it, is that the Angelus as dinged out on RTE seems to be moving away further from the foundation truth that the Angelus proclaims: The Word was made flesh and dwells among us.

Remember that sometimes a good General knows that something cannot be attacked directly. As our Lord said sometimes we have to live with the darnel among the wheat. But we have to be sure we are good wheat for Christ (St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Romans).

I was very struck reading how the Blessed Charles de Foucauld organised one Christmas day a whole day of Adoration around the Blessed Sacrament for soldiers of the French Foreign Legion. Now I am not saying that with family duties such be done on Christmas Day itself although some prayer that day has to be a must. But could some prayer or retreat be put in place, or just as we do in O'Connell St. also put something similar in more local venues.

Yes let us enjoy Christmas with our families, let us play Santa, but it should be in the context of that deeper meaning of the Feast: God has come to save us. That is what needs restoring.

I leave it with you to think, pray and act on. A Blessed Advent to you all.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill