



Allocutio



Presentata Curia 22nd October 2009

Allocutio: The Missions

We are in the month dedicated to the Missions and the spread of the Gospels. When we think of Missions we might think of St. Paul or St. Francis Xavier who travelled to places far from home and brought the Gospel to thousands and millions. But you might also think of St. Thérèse of Lisieux who stayed obscure in a Carmelite convent and by her prayers and by her witness to living the love of Christ there also was a great missionary. That is another reason to foster auxiliary membership.

Focusing on our own country we could think of our own St. Patrick or our Columban missionaries who witnessed to that Peregrinatio pro Christo which led them to leave security at home and venture afar to bring the faith to others. But there is another category of Irish people who also carried out that mission of spreading the faith and they are the millions of ordinary people in Irish society across the ages who kept the faith and shared it simply and humbly without fuss or bother with their children and families and neighbours. You and I are linked to St. Patrick by those millions of people we owe so much to. They are the little St. Thérèse! Recently I have been listening to the Word of God and what it is saying to me. And as I do I clearly hear Our Lord saying to me not to be afraid to witness to him. "Don't be afraid. I have called you by name and you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; rivers will not overwhelm you; if you should walk through fire you will not be burnt; the flame will not consume you. You are precious in my eyes and honoured and I love you. Don't be afraid. I am with you" (Is 43:1ss). In all your contact work and your PPC think about those words. But they speak to me of any situation of anxiety and stress you or I might be facing. I certainly hear Our Lord speaking to me about the work I have to do and the witness and example I have to give as a priest. But you also can take those words to heart and know that if you have the courage to come closer to God and be his friend he will help you bear witness to him despite your littleness. Surely that is what St. Thérèse, now the patron of the missions, is saying to us. She was little and a nobody in many ways. But in her own little humble life on her own patch she took God seriously and she took him to her heart and she engaged with him and let herself hear him. And look what he did with her. Could anyone have imagined the reception her relics would get in England and even the welcome among our Anglican brethren? Catholic Ireland! What else would you expect? But secular Britain? The simple fact is that people are crying out for authenticity and real wholeness and quite simply the whole of humanity knows how to spot the decent article. And when we have someone who can speak of God in plain English, as they say, then they take to her.

So if you and I can just have the courage to seek God and allow him to mould us in our littleness we can do great things to help the Gospel spread. Or maybe better. With Our lady we will be able to pray: For he who is Mighty has done great things for me and with me and through me. Yes, the humble virgin of Nazareth speaks to us of how much the little and insignificant ones of the world can have huge effect.

Again hear these words that the Lord speaks to you and me: Don't be afraid. I am with you. Do



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not be dismayed for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will support you with my victorious right hand. For I the Lord your God hold you by the right hand. So I say to you, “Don't be afraid, I will help you!” (Is 41: 10,13)

I said that I have not heard these words in the context of the report about to come out. No. But in that context they seem also to be saying something to us as well. Listen again to those words, “Don't be dismayed for I am your God.” Yes, God is God and as he told us Satan would try to sift us. But he also said that the powers of hell would not prevail against the Church. So don't be dismayed.

But let me come back to what I was saying. There is another passage of scripture that I have been praying recently and it comes from that prophet of doom, Jeremiah, of all people. Listen to it carefully. “I know the plans I have in mind for you-it is the Lord who speaks-plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you. Then when you call to me, and come to plead with me, I will listen to you. When you seek me you will find me. When you seek me with all your heart you will find me” (Jer 29:11-14).

That is where the missionary starts. He starts in his own heart to seek the Lord and embarks on a journey to discover the truth about God and himself and the relationship with God that is part of his own life. And then out of your own experience you can proclaim all that the Lord has done for you and you become a missionary. Like St. Thérèse. Like the myriad of Irish people a cross the ages who passed on the faith.

Can I just say one other thing? You may feel that you are a little person. You may be aware of how weak your faith is. You may feel that you are not a theologian or a trained person in the gospel. But do not underestimate the value of being little. That is the great key that St. Thérèse found. Because by being little she learnt to trust in God. And she took full advantage of her limitations and spoke in her simple way about what she had grasped about God. Because she spoke out of her littleness and her limitations she actually found the language that actually touches souls. Had she been a great scripture scholar or a brilliant theologian we might never have heard of her. Pope Benedict has written a fine work on Jesus of Nazareth. But most people will be touched more by the Gospel presented to us by the Little Flower, the Patron of the missions. No offence Pope Benedict, no offence. And remember how Frank Duff also saw that, that often it is the laity who know the life and ways of the ordinary person who may find ways of bringing the Gospel that priests and nuns might not be able to do.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill