



Allocutio



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Allocutio: God's Harvest

Halloween, All Saints and All souls is coming up and there have been many programmes on the harvest recently. Crops and fruits are coming in and it has always been traditional to celebrate the harvest.

God too speaks of a harvest. Not of vegies and fruits but of good souls. Christ tells us about the angels going in to reap and gather in the good wheat into the barns but the darnel is thrown onto a fire and burnt. In Ireland we sing, "Ag Chríost an síol, ag Chríost an fómhar. In iothlainn Dé go dtugtar sinn". May we all be gathered into the mansions of God.

I admit there is a mystery about death. Why do some babies die before they come to final birth or just after? I was struck by comment of Joe Duffy recently that about up to 62% of all children below 10 years of age dying in the late 1800s. In a society like that you were reminded of death as very much part of life. And questions arise: Why do some die as innocent children before they can seemingly commit any serious sin and the rest of us who grow up run even greater risks of perishing? Or if you visit cemeteries where so many young people in late teens and early twenties are buried, dead by TB. Why do we live in these times when that is so rare? Mystery about all our lives. God seems to gather in some of his harvest very early? Why? Maybe just as some crops must reach pollination phase if life is to be propagated then maybe some must live on for the sake of others. Why did God leave Mary behind after the Ascension? Clearly to help the early Church. But when the time was ripe he took her the first full fruit of his harvest.

Often when an elderly person dies it seems apt. Like the Biblical saying they had grown to the fullness of age and wisdom. I remember in my early twenties (I was actually on Peregrinatio at the time) hearing this elderly priest speak kindly to some children in Church and he seemed to tell them in such a nice way to keep quiet that they did and no one took offence. And then he gave a homily on the Blessed Trinity, something never easy I can assure you, but made it sound so natural that we all went home thinking all is very well with the world and with God. He died two days later and everybody wondered. He was ripe for the plucking.

Yes, God sowed this world and is taking in his harvest. Jesus speaks of many as good fruits and others as bad fruits. And sometimes the jury is still out and God asks that the plant be manured and given another chance. So where are you? Can heaven be heaven if a spirit is there that is always negative, always critical, is focused on its own selfishness and has no spirit of care and love for others? I just cannot see such a soul making heaven. But a soul who, like Christ, is prepared to suffer and make excuses and put up patiently with others and try to help the most awkward. Ah a place where everyone is like that sounds as if it could be worth being part of. And what if you are a bit of both? At times a



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decent soul but other times a bit bitchy or tetchy and bad mouthed about others? Well you may need pruning yet and so go on suffering in this world or purgatory till rounded off.

How does God know a soul? Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them!” What fruits? If someone by listening and encouraging lifts hearts and encourages them so they go on in life to help others, to help charity to grow, then that may be a good soul. Another who incites hate and suspicion and turns people against one another and even incites aggro and war, well that is different. Here is a good question for you and me: what good have I done; what good fruits have I produced? Have souls left me encouraged and inspired or up-lifted? Have people gone away from me feeling walked on and like dirt? Or am I someone taking up space? What kind of person am I really?

Years ago a guy was killed in his teens. He was a rough diamond. Other young people asked why? The local priest said to them well maybe God took him before he went totally astray. To be honest I can see that maybe God does take some souls out of this world and transfer them to another garden where they will do better just as some plants need moving into more light or a different kind of clay.

And that brings me to something else. When the Magdalene, not recognising him and thinking he was the Gardener said to the Risen Lord, “Where have you put him?” she may have been voicing a question on all our behalf about our loved ones, “Where have you put him. Why did you take him from us?” And the Lord, the good gardener smiles on us and says, “Trust in me. Trust in God. There are many mansions in my father’s house and when I go and prepare a place for you I will come and take you to myself so that where I am you may be too!”

The ways of the Good Gardener are mysterious. Maybe we could see our world as a nursery for heaven. We who live in the nursery of this world cannot guess the beautiful garden where he is taking us. “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard the great things God has prepared for those who love him”. Just as the gardener one day takes up the tender shoots and replants then in a better place when all is ready so God with us. Just as the shoot has to be developed to a certain degree and also must wait till a suitable place is ready before it is moved, we must trust God in what he is doing. So when someone goes expectantly maybe it is that quite simply God had his or her place ready where s/he will now do so much better. Let’s never be discouraged. Let us say simply as was often said in the Gospels when strange events happened. “It is the Lord!”

All that said I do not claim to understand all. There is a mystery out there. Why are some people suddenly killed by other men who use bombs and so on? Can this be God’s will? But since Jesus himself underwent a dreadful untimely end at the hands of others he is saying again to us: trust. Your Heavenly Father who sees all takes all into account and will be looking after you.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill