



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Christian present, uncertain future

If you ever walk down O'Connell St. you may notice in the window of the GPO a statue of a peculiar character known as Cu Chulainn. Anyone even vaguely familiar with ancient Irish folklore will have come across the boy who triumphantly slayed the hound of Chulainn with the use of his hurley stick. A couple of years ago, Guinness very cleverly used this image to advertise their sponsorship of the hurling championship. But apart from that particular event, details concerning Cu Chulainn's life remain somewhat unknown or forgotten by most of us. In actual fact, there were many other interesting tales concerning this mythological character. Take for example his death. Cu Chulainn was betrayed as a young man, unfairly put to death, pierced in the side as he died standing with his arms outstretched, and (in one account) he even rose from the dead and appeared to his friend. This part of the story might not be presented in a Guinness add, but for us Christians it may sound familiar.

Scholars of ancient Irish folklore can't help but recognise the fact that, in days before the scriptures became widely available, Irish storytellers frequently adapted old folk tales as a means of preaching Christ. That is not to say they were trying to equate our Divine saviour with a fictional character, but they were simply trying to use examples of what people were familiar with to demonstrate God's love. This was not just the case with folklore. Indeed, our ancestors used just about any means possible to evangelise. If you look at what survives from early literature, art, music, jewellery and crafts etc. it almost always points to Christ. Physical reminders such as the book of Kells and the Ardagh chalice have been found from under the earth, and above the earth Holy Wells and Mass rocks remain scattered across the country. Even in modern Gaelic to say 'hello', 'Dia Dhuit' is to ask for 'God be with you'. The reply, 'Dia is Mhuire Dhuit', goes further to introduce Our Lady. To examine any aspect of Irish culture over the past 1500 years, and try to separate the influence of Christianity, would prove a difficult task. Even in sport, GAA clubs remain structured on Parish boundaries, and whether they realise it or not, counties playing Gaelic football compete for a trophy modelled on a chalice used for the Mass. Keeping in mind how the earliest writings ever discovered on this island were those of St. Patrick, we could go so far as to claim, recorded Irish history itself began with the arrival of Christianity.

Perhaps we don't fully realise the importance of these times in which we live today. For the first time ever, Ireland wants to separate from its Christian roots. This nation, once so proud of its worldwide Catholic reputation, now looks with embarrassment on its loyalty to Rome. As Legionaries you may say the situation is not as bad as it is sometimes presented. Perhaps the media are to blame for exaggerating hostility towards the Church. Perhaps those who hold influential positions in our society are promoting a mentality which does not reflect the truth of how we really think. Regardless of public opinion, one thing is certain - there is still a deep yearning for God in our society. We know from our legionary work that when we engage with people on an individual basis, we soon discover that despite everything, the majority of Irish citizens are still receptive to the spiritual treasures which we have to offer.

Certainly all is not lost, and I encourage every legionary in these difficult times not to despair or lose hope. However, we also have to be realistic and address the serious challenges which face the Church. The present generation is unfamiliar with even the fundamental principles of the Catholic



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faith, and the notion that, 'to be Irish is to be Catholic', would certainly not be tolerated by our youth. We may not like to admit it, but we could be living through the era in which Irish culture separates from Irish Catholicism forever. This is a great shame considering the great Saints gone before us, the courageous missionaries who travelled the world, and the heroic martyrs who shed their blood on this land. But we have to ask ourselves - what is it exactly which motivates us as Legionaries of Mary today?

Certainly, we don't want to forget all which has gone before us. We should thank God on our knees for our Christian heritage. But what's more important, however, is that gift of faith which each of us has personally received. Those of us who can still recognise the truth within the Church have been given much. Much is expected of us. We are called to nothing less than to be Saints. Despite all the transitions which our society may be experiencing, our focus must remain on the interior struggle to live lives of heroic virtue, which in turn, impels us to share our faith with others. These are important times for shaping the future of Ireland, but these are also times in which many graces are to be obtained. Throughout history, it has always been during the times of spiritual turmoil and uncertainty in which the greatest Saints emerged.

To be a Catholic in modern Ireland is a wonderful opportunity for us to prove our love for Jesus and His Church. Being members of Our Lady's legion places us in an extra special place to make that love a living reality. Remember that to be a follower of Christ is not about dwelling on the past. Rather, to be a follower of Christ is about building upon all which has gone before us and looking towards the future with joy. Last Saturday evening I had the wonderful privilege of being present in Hyde Park with the Holy Father. I end with a quote from his words: "In our own time, the price to be paid for fidelity to the Gospel is no longer being hanged, drawn and quartered but it often involves being dismissed out of hand, ridiculed or parodied. And yet, the Church cannot withdraw from the task of proclaiming Christ and His Gospel as saving truth, the source of our ultimate happiness as individuals and as the foundation of a just and humane society". Amen.

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