

Feast of Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary : 2010

(Revelation 11: 19, 12: 1-6, 10; I Corinthians 15: 20-27. Luke 1: 39-56)

Anecdote: Mary's role as reflecting the maternal love of God. God is walking around Heaven one day, and notices a number of people on the heavenly streets who should not be there. He finds St. Peter at the gate and says to him, "Peter, you've been remiss in your duties. You're letting in the wrong sort of people." "Don't blame me, Lord," replies Peter. "I turn them away just like you said to. Then they go around to the back door and Jesus' mother lets them in."

The Feast of the Assumption is one of the most important feasts of our Lady. Catholics believe in the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven. We believe that when her earthly life was finished, Mary was taken up, body and soul, into heavenly glory, where the Lord exalted her as Queen of Heaven. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 966). The Assumption is the feast of Mary's total liberation from death and decay, the consequences of original sin. It is also the remembrance of the day when the Church gave official recognition to the centuries-old belief of Christians about the Assumption of their heavenly mother. In the Orthodox church, the *koimesis*, or *dormitio* ("falling asleep") of the Virgin began to be commemorated on August 15 in the 6th century. The observance gradually spread to the West, where it became known as the feast of the Assumption. By the 13th century, the belief had been accepted by most Catholic theologians, and it was a popular subject with Renaissance and Baroque painters. It was on November 1, 1950, that, through the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentimus Deus*, Pope Pius XII officially declared the Assumption as a dogma of Catholic faith. On this important feast day, we try to answer two questions: 1) What is meant by "Assumption?" 2) Why do we believe in Mary's Assumption into heaven despite the fact that there is no reference to it in the Bible? "Assumption" means that after her death, Mary was taken into heaven, both body and soul, as a reward for her sacrificial cooperation in the divine plan of salvation. "On this feast day, let us thank the Lord for the gift of the Mother, and let us pray to Mary to help us find the right path every day" (Pope Benedict XVI).

The second reading from First Corinthians is Paul's defense of the resurrection of the dead, an apt selection on the feast of our heavenly Mother's Assumption into heaven. In the *Magnificat*, or song of Mary, given in today's gospel, Mary acknowledges that "*the Almighty has done great things*" for her. Besides honoring her as Jesus' mother, God has blessed her with the gift of bodily Assumption. God, who has "lifted up" his "lowly servant" Mary, lifts up all the lowly, not only because they are faithful, but also because God is faithful to the promise of divine mercy. Thus the feast of the Assumption celebrates the mercy of God or the victory of God's mercy as expressed in Mary's *Magnificat*.

Tradition on Mary's Assumption: The fact of Mary's death is generally accepted by the Church Fathers and theologians and is expressly affirmed in the liturgy of the Church. Origen (died AD 253), St. Jerome (died AD 419) and St. Augustine (died AD 430), among others, argue that Mary's death was not a punishment for sin, but only the result of her being a descendant of Adam and Eve. When Pope Pius XII made the proclamation on November 1, 1950, he put into words a belief held by the faithful for over 1500 years. Way back in AD 325 the Council of Nicea spoke of the Assumption of Mary. Writing in AD 457, the Bishop of Jerusalem said that when Mary's tomb was opened, it was "found empty. The apostles judged her body had been taken into heaven.

Pope Pius XII based his declaration of the Assumption on both tradition and theology. The uninterrupted tradition in the Eastern Churches starting from the first century, the apocryphal first century book, *Transitus Mariae*, and the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, such as St. Gregory and St John Damascene, supported and promoted the popular belief in the Assumption of Mary. There is a tomb at the foot of the Mt. of Olives where ancient tradition says that Mary was laid. But there is nothing inside. There are no relics, as with the other saints. This is acceptable negative evidence of Mary's Assumption. Besides, credible apparitions of Mary, though not recorded in the New Testament, have been recorded from the 3rd century till today.

In his decree on the dogma of the Assumption, Pope Pius XII gives four theological reasons to support this traditional belief.

#1: The degeneration or decay of the body after death is the result of original sin. However, since, through a special intervention of God, Mary was born without original sin, it is not proper that God would permit her body to degenerate in the tomb.

#2: Since Mary was given the fullness of grace, heaven is the proper place for this sinless mother of Jesus.

#3: Mary was our *co-redeemer*, or *fellow-redeemer*, with Christ in a unique sense. Hence her rightful place is with Christ our redeemer in heavenly glory. (The term Co-redeemer or Co-redemptrix, means "cooperator with the Redeemer." This is what St. Paul meant when he said "*We are God's co-workers*" I Cor. 3:9.). Hence, it is "fitting" that she should be given the full effects of the Redemption, which is the glorification of the soul and the body.

#4: In the Old Testament, we read that the prophet Elijah was taken into heaven in a fiery chariot. Thus, it appears natural and possible that the mother of Jesus would also be taken into heaven.

Since Mary's Assumption was a reward for her saintly life, this feast reminds us that we, too, must be pure and holy in body and soul, since our bodies will be glorified on the day of our resurrection. St. Paul tells us that our bodies are the temples of God because the Holy Spirit dwells within us. He also reminds us that our bodies are also members (parts) of the Body of Christ.

On this feast day of our heavenly Mother, let us offer ourselves on the altar and pray for her special care and loving protection in helping us lead a purer and holier life.

JOKES OF THE WEEK : Miss Holy cheek, the Catholic Sunday school teacher, had just finished explaining the feast of the Assumption to her class. "Now," she said, "let all those children who want to go to heaven to see their heavenly mother raise their hands." All the children raised their hands except little Marie in the front row. "Don't you want to go to heaven, Marie?" asked Miss Holy cheek. "I can't," said Marie tearfully. "My mother told me to come straight home after Sunday school