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Image: Detail | Ceiling of the *Assumption of Mary* in Santa Maria Immacolata a via Veneto, Rome | photo by Livioandronico

Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary

Saint of the Day for August 15

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The Story of the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary

On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII defined the Assumption of Mary to be a dogma of faith: “We pronounce, declare and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma that the immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul to heavenly glory.” The pope proclaimed this dogma only after a broad consultation of bishops, theologians and laity. There were few dissenting voices. What the pope solemnly declared was already a common belief in the Catholic Church.

We find homilies on the Assumption going back to the sixth century. In following centuries, the Eastern Churches held steadily to the doctrine, but some authors in the West were hesitant. However by the 13th century there was universal agreement. The feast was celebrated under various names—Commemoration, Dormition, Passing, Assumption—from at least the fifth or sixth century. Today it is celebrated as a solemnity.

Scripture does not give an account of Mary’s Assumption into heaven. Nevertheless, Revelation 12 speaks of a woman who is caught up in the battle between good and evil. Many see this woman as God’s people. Since Mary best embodies the people of both Old and New Testaments, her Assumption can be seen as an exemplification of the woman’s victory.

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul speaks of Christ’s resurrection as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Since Mary is closely associated with all the mysteries of Jesus’ life, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit has led the Church to believe in Mary’s share in his glorification. So close was she to Jesus on earth, she must be with him body and soul in heaven.

Reflection

In the light of the Assumption of Mary, it is easy to pray her Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) with new meaning. In her glory she proclaims the greatness of the Lord and finds joy in God her savior. God has done marvels to her and she leads others to recognize God’s holiness. She is the lowly handmaid who deeply revered her God and has been raised to the heights. From her position of strength she will help the lowly and the poor find justice on earth, and she will challenge the rich and powerful to distrust wealth and power as a source of happiness.

In Honor of the Assumption

O Immaculate Virgin, Mother of God and Mother of men.

We believe with all the fervor of our faith in your triumphal Assumption, both in body and soul, into heaven, where you are acclaimed as Queen by all the choirs of angels and all the legions of saints; and we unite with them to praise and bless the Lord who has exalted you above all other pure creatures, and to offer you the tribute of our devotion and our love.

We know that your gaze, which on earth watched over the humble and suffering humanity of Jesus, is filled in heaven with the vision of that Humanity glorified, and with the vision of Uncreated Wisdom; and that the joy of your soul in the direct contemplation of the adorable Trinity causes your heart to throb with overwhelming tenderness.

And we, poor sinners, whose body weighs down the flight of the soul, beg you to purify our hearts, so that, while we remain here below, we may learn to see God, and God alone, in the beauties of His creatures.

We trust that your merciful eyes may deign to glance down upon our miseries and our sorrows, upon our struggles and our weaknesses; that your countenance may smile upon our joys and our victories; that you may hear the voice of Jesus saying to you of each one of us, as He once said to you of His beloved disciple: behold thy son.

And we who call upon you as our Mother, like John, take you as the guide, strength, and consolation of our mortal life.

We are inspired by the certainty that your eyes which wept over the earth, watered by the Blood of Jesus, are yet turned toward this world, held in the clutch of wars, persecutions, and oppression of the just and the weak.

And from the shadows of this vale of tears, we seek in your heavenly assistance and tender mercy comfort for our aching hearts and help in the trials of the Church and of our fatherland.

We believe, finally, that in the glory where you reign, clothed with the sun and crowned with the stars, you are, after Jesus, the joy and gladness of all the angels and of all the saints.

And from this earth, over which we tread as pilgrims, comforted by our faith in the future resurrection, we look to you, our life, our sweetness, and our hope; draw us onward with the sweetness of your voice, that one day, after our exile, you may show us Jesus, the blessed Fruit of your womb, O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

What are Five Ways that The Assumption of Mary Can Help Us in Our Relationship with God?

1. To give us stronger faith in Mary's intercession! As Mary was united with Jesus in His love and willingness to sacrifice so we are inspired to trust in her prayers for us now.

2. To place greater value on our lives being completely dedicated to carrying out the Father's will and bringing good to others as Mary's life was.

3. To help us recognize the ultimate and lofty goal to which our bodies and souls are destined. Mary's Assumption helps us to make our belief in our final resurrection stronger and more effective.

4. To help us persevere in our struggle against evil and inspire us to fight it in a more dedicated way. As Mary was "intimately associated with Jesus in His struggle against evil" and participated in His final victory against it, so she joins us in our struggle against evil and leads us to victory against it.

5. To give us a new perspective on our lives. Mary always put God first and loved Him single-heartedly. This inspires us to live in the same way. As Mary's sinlessness led her to her Assumption and glorification, so her life inspires us to hate sin and seek holiness so that we may someday enjoy what Mary now enjoys in Heaven.