



ST. BARTHOLOMEW the APOSTLE
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION

"Blessed are you among woman, and blessed is the child you will bear!"

It is challenging to understand the "physics" of the Feast of the Assumption, but it is comforting to hear the singing of the Magnificat by the one whose feast day we celebrate today. Before touching on Luke's masterful Gospel for today, my all-time favorite explanation of the Assumption comes from a typical teacher-student exchange. The teacher asks, *Who can tell me what the Feast of the Assumption is all about?"* A little boy offers this response, *It means that Mary was so holy that we just assume she went to Heaven."*

The little boy's thinking about Mary being so holy is deeply resonant with the Scriptures we hear proclaimed for this feast.



Her holiness is steeped in the fact that, as a first-century Galilean woman, she simply recognizes that God is doing great things in her and through her – *isn't this what all disciples are called toward?*

So, to be **who** we are, and to be **that** well is the stuff of personal holiness, even sanctity!

Accepting the implications of achieving holiness in the here and now, present-tense moments of our lives simply by living each day well in the zip code where we live *is liberating*.

Madeline Delbrel, in one of her best-loved books, ***We, the Ordinary People of the Streets***, captures her sense of the possibilities to be found on behalf of the gospel in ordinary life. She wrote,

There are some people whom God takes and sets apart. There are others he leaves among the crowd, people he does not withdraw from the world." These are the people who have an ordinary job, an ordinary household. People with ordinary



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sicknesses, and ordinary times of grieving. People with an ordinary house, and ordinary clothes. These are the people of ordinary life. The people we might meet on any street. They love the door that opens onto the street, just as their brothers who are hidden from the world love the door that shuts behind them forever. We, the ordinary people of the streets, believe with all our might that this street, this world, where God has placed us, is our place of holiness.

Mary certainly stands with anyone- past, present, or future- who recognizes and honors that God **does** work wonders in and through individuals who allow their own ordinariness to be the stuff of radical holiness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, commenting on the Gospel for today, said that Mary's song *has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, relentless song about collapsing*



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thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind”.

I was so touched recently by a man who spoke on the news after a terrible hurricane, standing amidst all the rubble of what was once his home, alongside his wife. He said very simply that the hurricane had not taken what is most important – and then he turned and embraced his wife.

In that news snippet we learned that richness is not counted by what you have, but it is counted by whom you have standing by your side.

Mary's Magnificat is sung to address this very experience that when one stands with God, who is the author of life and love, then no matter how lowly the world may make one feel, no matter how devastating the circumstances of one's life, **we are rich in the eyes of God.** Theologian Elizabeth Johnson rightly suggests that even though Mary is socially insignificant in the



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eyes of the world, she is still highly favored by God. Mary also mirrors our final destiny in Christ, to be raised up in the Communion of all the Saints, with Christ who reigns.

On this Feast it seems that we are also given a glimpse of Heaven. In the Book of Revelation, there is a woman described as being clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet. What I especially love is the next image of the red dragon ready to devour the child. It reminds me of the wonderful children's book by Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*.

In this book, a little boy named Max sets out on an amazing adventure wrestling with the "wild things" of his imagination only to discover that by doing so he actually finds out the true meaning of home.

Aren't the "Wild things" what the dragon symbolizes for all of us?

We are all encouraged to ride that dragon, to wrestle with the



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wild things, trusting our destiny, like Mary's, is that God has good things in store for us! American author and journalist, Margaret Mitchell, suggesting there are two handles to every problem, says that *you can grab it by the handle of fear or the handle of hope*."

This Feast day encourages us to literally grab the problems we face each day, and to wrestle with the wild things of our imaginings by the handle of hope. There have been many studies conducted on the effects of fear and anxiety on the baby in its mother's womb. Just imagine some of the worries that Mary had to face for herself – and even the concerns she had for her elder cousin who was pregnant! *Yet*, even after her arduous trek to visit Elizabeth, Mary and her cousin realized that their pre-natal babies were leaping for joy in their wombs?



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We see the full blossoming of hope announced by Elizabeth as she delighted in the fact that Mary was blessed because she believed that the promises of the Lord would be fulfilled.

Mary's willingness to believe that the promises of the Lord

would be fulfilled is a posture that she assumes for the

rest of her life, and it is one that we also need to take on

as we reflect on our own particular situation and vocation

in life. Writing about Mary in his book *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, James

Martin reminds the reader that *Mary was told that her son would*

be the Son of God, not that he would be tortured, put to death on

a cross, and then rise from the dead. Mary says yes to a future

that she does not know. She is an example of letting God do

God's work, without trying to figure it out." **Sometimes I**

wonder whether we spend too much time trying to figure

life out instead of trusting that God will work it out.



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The scene of these two women embracing, while the children in their wombs are leaping for joy, serves as a prelude to the beautiful canticle which Mary was about to sing.

As Martin Luther observed, *she sang it not for herself alone, but for all of us to sing it after her.*"

Thus, discovering, as did Mary, that God is as real as the problems we face each day, we come to know and love God whose mercy is from age to age" and has lifted up the lowly."

Mary says it so well: *The Almighty has done great things for me,*

*and holy is God's name." **As that little boy said so***

unassumingly, this Feast is all about assuming Mary went to heaven because she was so holy.



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We, too, know that in sharing in the holiness of God, we ultimately come to know ourselves as we truly are and then strive to be that well.