

Reflecting on Sunday's Readings

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY—August 15, 2021

Introduction: As we celebrate the Assumption of Mary, these questions come to mind: What does Mary mean to you? How should she affect your life?

It was in 1950 that Pope Pius XII issued a Papal Bull making the assumption of Mary into heaven, official dogma of the Catholic Church. However, as early as the 5th century elements of this belief were beginning to be manifest in the church, and in subsequent centuries they were affirmed by Church theologians.

For many, Catholics' reverence of Mary, and belief in her Immaculate Conception and Assumption into heaven are difficult to grasp and accept. We often are criticized for revering holy places and holy relics, but it may just be the absence of these that provides the most convincing evidence of Mary's Assumption. Is not the absence of Mary's body, or any part of it, a strong indication of her dormition? Should we not see portions of her body preserved and cherished in some holy place? But we do not. This doctrine, like all the mysteries of the Church, must be taken on faith. And it takes faith, albeit in our own reasoning, to disavow this doctrine. Either way we exercise faith. Which requires the greater faith, to believe as the Church teaches that she was taken bodily into heaven, or to believe that her body was ignored by those who loved and revered her?

As we see in this week's Gospel reading, and in other passages of Scripture, the Holy Spirit drew special attention to Mary's life of obedience and faith. Throughout the history of the Church, Mary has been honored with special attention and devotion. Is it the intent of the Holy Spirit, and of the Church to simply honor Mary, or is there an additional important dimension to this attention and devotion, namely that she is to be a model of discipleship for those of us who follow her example by putting faith in her son, Jesus?

Paul VI in the encyclical *Marialis Cultus* suggests that Mary's life calls us to a grace filled life, where the indwelling of the Holy Spirit should bring about transformation into his image: "Devotion to the Mother of the Lord becomes for the faithful an opportunity for growing in divine grace, and this is the ultimate aim of all pastoral activity. For it is impossible to honor her who is 'full of grace' (Lk 1:28) without thereby honoring in oneself the state of grace, which is friendship with God, communion with Him and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is this divine grace which takes possession of the whole man and conforms him to the image of the Son of God. (*cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18*)"

In a passage which we can only quote in part here because of its length, Pope Paul VI says, "The Blessed Virgin's exemplary holiness encourages the faithful to 'raise their eyes to Mary who shines forth before the whole community of the elect as a model of the virtues.' It is a question of solid, evangelical virtues; faith and the docile acceptance of the Word of God . . . generous obedience . . . genuine humility . . . solicitous charity . . ." Marian devotion should first and foremost be a following of her example and the obeying of her instruction, "Do whatever he tells you." (Jn. 2:5) In this way we truly honor both her and Jesus, the Lord of her heart.

The Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is a time for us to find hope through Mary's life and example. She has preceded us to heaven as testimony to that bodily resurrection to which all followers of Christ can look forward with joy. Her life and the brief biblical record of her recorded statements point us to a life of surrender to the Father, holiness through the Spirit, and devotion to her

Son. We would be amiss if we did not include in our celebration of her Assumption a rededication to her life calling, the glorification and exaltation of her Son the Lord Jesus in and through our lives.

First Reading — 1 Chr 15:3-4, 15-16; 16:1-2

David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring the ark of the Lord to the place which he had prepared for it. David also called together the sons of Aaron and the Levites.

The Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders with poles, as Moses had ordained according to the word of the Lord.

David commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kinsmen as chanters, to play on musical instruments, harps, lyres, and cymbals, to make a loud sound of rejoicing.

They brought in the ark of God and set it within the tent which David had pitched for it. Then they offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings to God. When David had finished offering up the burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord.

1. What aspects of Mary's life did the Holy Spirit emphasize in this vision given to John?"

Responsorial Reading — 132:6-7, 9-10, 13-14

Second Reading — 1 Cor 15:54b-57

Brothers and sisters: When that which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. What affect does disbelieve in the resurrection have on people?

3. What does it mean, practically, to be “in subjection”? How did Mary demonstrate this?

Gospel Reading — Lk 11:27-28

While Jesus was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.” He replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”

4. How does Mary’s life demonstrate submission to God’s will?

5. Why do you think the Holy Spirit caused this incident to take place and be recorded for posterity?