

August 15, 2018 5:30 p.m.

### **Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

This Holy Day of Obligation brings us together precisely half-way through this work week, and half-way through this month of August. Like it or not, we are rapidly closing in on the unofficial end of summertime, and ever more quickly coming closer and closer to the return of the new School Year.

Today's Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary is the only summertime Holy Day of Obligation, and the one which celebrates our Catholic belief that when Mary naturally died, that she was supernaturally taken up – that is, “assumed” – into Heaven, soul and body, where she intercedes for us, the Church on Earth, for all time.

And so, today's Feast is very significant for two important reasons: first, because all of us, just like Mary was, are mortal, human beings, and in God's good time, just like Mary, our lives in this world will come to a natural end. The second reason is because as the Creed teaches us, we believe in the “resurrection of the body and life everlasting.”

But, as we consider these two important realities that all human beings share in common, including our Blessed Mother, we also come to recognize in today's Feast that there is one significant difference between Mary, and the rest of us (aside, of course, from the fact that Mary was conceived without the natural tendency toward sin since she was conceived without Original Sin): she didn't have to wait until the Second Coming of Christ at the end of all time for her “resurrection of the body”. That wondrous event took place immediately upon her natural death, as she was “assumed”, soul and body, into heaven.

Today's Feast focuses a lot of attention on the *bodiliness* of who we are. We're living at a time in our world, and even in our Church, that should give us all reason to reflect, and pray for changes of heart within us all.

A week ago on Monday, August 6<sup>th</sup>, we not only celebrated the great Feast of the Transfiguration, but we also recalled that 73 years ago on that date, the first Atomic Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and then 3 days later, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Bomb on Nagasaki, killing tens of thousands of people.

And yesterday, the Church celebrated the Feast of St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe, a priest who exchanged his life for another man's who was about to be

killed in 1941. But we can never forget what the context of that situation was – it was taking place during the horrific events of the Holocaust as the “unthinkable” happened as more than six million people were killed/murdered/gassed simply because of their race/religion, while the rest of the world stood by and watched; though eventually the world came to its senses and it was stopped.

And then yesterday, we also heard awful and tragic reports about heinous events of another sort in our Church as the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report was issued, making public disturbing details of sexual abuse by clergy over a 70-year period in six Pennsylvania dioceses.

Whether it’s the use of atomic bombs, the threat of nuclear armaments, genocide by gassing, or sexual abuse of fragile young people, they are all affronts against people, in body and soul, disregarding the dignity and respect God has given to each.

In those dark moments of world history, we occasionally see bright lights like St. Maximilian Kolbe was during the Holocaust. In our current situation in the scandals affecting our Church, we need all of us to be “bright lights”, to stand against anything that is of the Evil One, while at the same time, to not lose faith because of the weakness and sinfulness of the relative few. In the public statement that I sent out just a little while ago, I am calling on all of us to renew our faith in Jesus, and to stand strongly against the forces of evil by taking on ourselves even more intense prayer and sacrifice, to root out evil and to let the light of Christ’s love shine in the world.

Our Blessed Mother remains our model in faith, in good times, and even in the dark times of our lives. With every moment, from the Annunciation, to the Visitation (which we saw in today’s Gospel), to the incredibly challenging birth of Jesus, the flight into Egypt, and every other moment of Mary’s life, including accompanying Jesus on the way of the cross, and standing strongly at the foot of the cross at the absolutely darkest moment in the history of the world – Mary remained faithful, and unflinching in her “Yes” – her “Fiat” years before when “the Word became Flesh and began to dwell among us”.

When we come together here for Mass, and when we focus on our responsibility of how we are living our lives in this world, we focus, naturally, on the spiritual dimension of who we are. Yet, we are human beings, made up of body and soul – we live in this human, finite, imperfect world, and we should be

attuned to how well we take care of our bodies and our souls, for we are one person! And at the same time, we should be quite aware of how we treat other human beings.

As I mentioned earlier, the major difference between our Blessed Mother and all the rest of the human race is that she was conceived without Original Sin, which we celebrate on another holy day, the Immaculate Conception. Of course, we realize the reason for that was because God knew that one day, Mary would conceive God's Son in her womb, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and give birth to Jesus, the Savior of the world. And we know that Mary, through the Grace of God, never chose to sin over the course of her entire human life. She lived an absolutely pure and holy life throughout all her years in this world, and with each passing "event", she conformed herself more and more intimately in a spirit of oneness with God/through God's Son – her Son. Therefore, since none of the corrupting power of sin was ever at work within her soul, God would make sure that neither would any natural corruption have any effect on her body, so that God could then "assume" her body and soul immediately into heaven.

We never have reason to be discouraged, to lose heart, or to give up on our Faith or our Church, despite the scandals and attacks that the Church endures. Why? Because our Blessed Mother never gives up on us, and because Jesus has won the Victory, as we heard in our Second Reading.

We heard St. Paul tell the Corinthians, and remind us: *"at the end (of all time), Christ will come and hand over the Kingdom to His God and Father after He has destroyed every sovereignty, authority and power....and the last enemy to be destroyed is death."* That's when our bodies will be reunited with our souls in a glorified state – at the end of all time.

And so, as we celebrate this beautiful Feast of Mary's Assumption, we realize how important it is for us to do everything we can to live holy lives in this world – to keep trying to open ourselves to God's Grace so that we too can choose, as consistently as possible, to say "Yes" to God, and to avoid the corrupting and destructive power of Sin in our lives.

Today's Feast also should encourage us to recommit ourselves to have a renewed respect and dignity for ALL human life – the precious "bodiliness" of all human beings.

Let us continue living good and holy lives in this world, even as we keep looking forward, *with joyful hope*, to “the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

God bless you!