

Reading: [Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary | USCCB](#)

*Have you ever felt the earth shake?*

My first day living at the rectory house, I thought we were having lots of little earthquakes... I didn't realize the passing of the trains were so powerful that not only could you hear them, but also feel them... the whole little house shakes.

It's an interesting feeling, the earth shaking... if you've ever been in an earthquake before, you know just how frightening that experience can be... feels like the world is ending and there is literally nowhere to run (prayers for our Haitian family as they struggle with the aftermath of yet another earthquake).

There is so much power in an earthquake it's no wonder it has become a metaphor to describe impactful life events, good and bad, those that "shake us to the core."

I've been *shaken to the core* more than once in my life... I've had a few near-death experiences on my hiking trips, family health scares, the crisis of faith I've been sharing, and then that life-changing moment which I am yet to get to in our continual homily from the past weeks... which *we will* continue and wrap it up next week.

To be shaken to the core... for a lot of people when shaken to the core, when feeling in danger and there is nowhere else to run, they desire their mother.

We've all seen when a child falls or gets scared, they immediately call out for mom, run to her arms. I see it with my little nephews and nieces all the time... and even if I can help them get better, they refuse anyone else's help... only mom can give them the safety and comfort they need at that moment.

As a priest, I get the privilege of being with people in some of those most difficult moments... especially near end of life, and often, not always but often, just before someone dies, especially someone elderly, they call out "mama, mama." It is an incredibly heartfelt experience... maybe some of you have witnessed it with your own loved ones.

There is something powerful about the image of a mother... they are the first individuals who hold us at birth when we are most vulnerable. They are the first experience of protection during the traumatic experience that birthing can be... and it is traumatic, it's a good thing we don't remember it... we are taken from a place of comfort and security and forced out into to a foreign world fully exposed to the elements and dangers... so our mother becomes our first defenders, protectors.

Sociologists suggest this might have something to do with why, when *shaken to the*

*core* in various moments of our lives and we feel in danger and like there is nowhere to run, there is this almost innate need to call out Mama... to run to her arms.

I'd like to take these two images, that of an earthquake and this seeming innate desire for our mothers in times of danger, as the basis for our reflection today in this *Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary*.

Today as a Church, we declare that *Mary has been taken up body and soul to the glory of heaven*. I'd like to make a case for why this is important and how this belief is relevant in our daily lives, not only in the life of a Christian, not only something for Catholics to uphold, but for the whole of humanity.

To do this, keep in mind what I just presented to you, the suggestive psychology about the need for our mothers when shaken to the core because we are going to be jumping back and forward in scripture to bring this solemnity to life... so wish me luck... or better yet, good luck to you in trying to keep up. I am talking about human anthropology, one of my favorite subjects so I did get carried away... just forewarning you this is one of my longest homilies to date. Let's begin.

The coming of Jesus was like an earthquake in history, that event shook humanity to its core, an event whose rumbles and shocks continue to be felt through

the ages. Anyone, believer, or non-believer can see the effects that have come out of this Christian movement, sometimes for better, other times for worse.

*For better*, the Church shakes humanity to its core when she is a light in the darkness proclaiming the message of Christ's love, forgiveness, and unity. We can proudly look back at our history and see how influential she has been in contributions to education and science, the development of ethics and politics... we uphold examples of saints, past and present, who have advocated for the poor and oppressed... we hold the title for the largest charitable organizations in the world led by people who are convicted by the commandment of love of God and neighbor. When faced with the choice of good over evil, often through her, good has triumph.

*For worse*, the Church has shaken humanity to its core when some of her members choose darkness: the horrific acts of the inquisition, the forced conversions of native Americans including the disturbing recent findings of the remains of hundreds of native American children buried on the grounds of catholic schools... then there is the inexcusable abuse and cover up of minors by clergy. When faced with choice of good or evil, some have chosen the latter.

So yes, the coming of Jesus was like an earthquake in history, it has *shaken humanity to its core* for good or ill, some would call it hypocrisy, and we can all see it...

There seems to be this battle, this tension, between the breaking in of God's love initiated by Jesus, and the sin that Jesus exposed which was *hidden in society since the foundation of the world (Matthew 13:35)*. That is what happens when sin and evil is exposed, it retaliates, it resists, it accuses, it tries to *shake our ground*, make us panic and insecure until we feel like there is nowhere else to run, so we either go against each other, or we hide.

Jesus warned us about this. Remember that troubling passage from Luke 12:49?

*I have come to set the earth on fire... Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.*

Jesus said these words as a warning to those very first Christians to tell them that if they chose to live the values of the Kingdom of Heaven, then they were going to face persecution because they would encounter resistance from the vices of the world they were now rejecting, and this would be both an internal and external battle.

The *internal* tension would come in their struggle with personal sin. St. Paul said it best in Romans 7: *What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate.* Can anyone here relate?

The *external* tension would come in their relationships, their family and society would go against them as they would see them as a threat to their power and control.

So, Jesus gives this head up, this warning, because they would experience it right away as they were *shaken to the core* when they witnessed the death of Jesus. Matthew 27: *Jesus cried out in a loud voice and gave up his spirit... and behold the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two... the earth quaked; rocks were split...*

Internally they didn't know what to make of it... they felt the tension between trusting what Jesus had told them and doubting if he would really raise from the dead. Externally, they were being persecuted by the authorities to arrest them... this

event *shook them to the core*, and they didn't know where to run... where to go... *they didn't have a mother to run to*... and they also knew Jesus would not have wanted them to fight back, so they did the only thing they could do... they *hid for fear of the Jews* (John 20).

Let's jump now 40 years later after that earthquake, to the very first Christian communities. Just like the disciples, these communities were *shaken to the core* when they experienced horrific persecution by the Roman empire led by Nero. These Christians witnessed how their family and friends were being taken, tied to posts, and burned alive. Thrown into the Colosseum to be eaten alive. Tortured for their faith... it was a direct experience of evil, it felt like the end of the world... they had nowhere to go, no mother to run to, so they hid.

This is the context in which the book of Revelation, which sounds like the end of the world, is written. And within those words, comes an image that they were longing for... a woman crowned with stars and clothed with the sun appears in the sky... *they were given a mother*, someone to run to, someone who would give them the protection and security they needed.

Who is this woman? The primary identity of this woman is *the Church*. Let's briefly jump back to the Genesis experience. In genesis, we have a description of

the *birth of the spiritual sense in humanity*, and like all births, it was an earth-shaking traumatic event.

People experienced suffering and in trying to make sense of the world, they discover that there exists this tension between inner pride and envy and wanting to do good, but no one seemed to have the fullness of free will to always choose good over evil. The story they came up with to describe this reality is known as “the fall of Adam and Eve” which describes how humanity is constantly being shaken to the core when they experience evil... they didn’t know where to go, what to do, they had no *mother to run to*, so they hid in the garden.

Good sees how humanity was incapable of perfectly choosing the good and is moved with *tender love and care (hessed)* by our longing for someone to run to in our human struggle. Genesis 3:15; *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel.*

With this in mind, jump back now to Revelation during those persecutions. There was a *new birth*, the birth of a new movement composed of all the newly baptized believers in Jesus. Like all births, this birth was also traumatic, it exposed them to the tension between good and evil, Jesus warned them that they would be

hated because of his name (Mark 13:13)... and the danger was that evil would triumph, all Christians would be killed or they would be too scared to ever come out of hiding until eventually the love and grace of God that Jesus came to bring would have faded away and that earth shaking event of the incarnation and resurrection would no longer be felt...

Just when they thought they had nowhere to run to, that it was all over, that sign, that woman, appears in the sky... and they realized that that woman God had promised long ago to their ancestors, was finally there, present in their midst, the Church. Finally, they could stop hiding, *they were in the arms of a mother* who would lead them through the valley of the shadow of death (psalm 23).

The church is our mother, it is for us a place we run to when we are shaken to the core, a place we need to live in as we are exposed to the elements, the resistances to God's grace in our lives. Despite the human error of her members, the Church as mother continues to provide support and guidance to her children, a source of food and nourishment especially in those earth-shaking experiences that seem to be the end of the world. But we are not done yet... *There is another dimension to this woman.*

Over time, the early Church fathers reflected on this image of the woman, and the Spirit led them see in that image of the woman also the image of Mary. When they saw this, then all the sudden, John 19 made sense:

*When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home (John 19:26-27)*

To declare that Mary was assumed into heaven, and that she too shares the description of Genesis and Revelation, is to say that Mary was able to do what no human has been able to do: in being full of grace, she was able to on behalf of all humanity, freely choose the good as she said: *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word (Luke 1:38),*

This unique freedom is what places her in the position of being the mother not just of Christians, not just of Catholics, but of humanity: a mother ready to respond especially when we are shaken the core and call out mama. In Mary, we have someone to run to as she unites her perfect will to our human struggles. When shaken to the core, when feeling like giving up or walking away, we are assured we are not orphans, we do have someone to run to, there is no need to hide.

Regardless of what place Mary has in your own spirituality: this solemnity of her assumption into heaven places her at the forefront of our own human journey.

All of us experience the traumatic effects of being born... and as Christians, the new birth we receive places us in the middle of that same tension Jesus warned about... we will be shaken to the core at some points of our lives... internally as we struggle with personal sin, externally as we navigate tensions within our families and society, even at the hour of our death.

Mary is God's gift to us, have someone to run to, to call mother, and so we do.

*Hail, Mary, full of grace,*

*the Lord is with thee.*

*Blessed art thou amongst women*

*and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,*

*pray for us sinners,*

*now and at the hour of our death.*

*Amen.*

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