

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY 15th August

A little more on the readings of the day



The **Gospel reading** is from Luke's account of the Visitation. Mary has just been told by the angel Gabriel that she is to conceive and bare a son and she is given a sign, 'Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth also, in her old age, herself conceived a son...' Mary sets out to visit her aged relation who, prompted by the Spirit, asks the question when greeted by Mary, 'Why should I be visited by the mother of my Lord?' This shows her respect for her young relative because what she carries in her womb makes her 'the mother of my Lord.' The first reading gives us a vision of a woman (Mary) whose child is attacked by a dragon (the devil). The second reading gives Paul's teaching on the fact of the resurrection.

The **First Reading** is from the Book of the Apocalypse (Greek) or Revelation (English). It is a revelation of hidden things, particularly of hidden events in the future. The authors of apocalyptic writings may be considered the successors of the prophets; they heard the Word of God and passed it on by word of mouth, whereas apocalyptic writers were given revelation in a dream and passed it on in writing. The language of this writing is richly symbolic and the importance of the visions which are described is never in their immediate literal meaning. The imagery must be appreciated at its true value and we must do our best to translate the symbols back into the ideas which the author intended them to convey. This type of writing became very popular in the two centuries before Christ, the visions of Ezekiel and Zechariah paving the way, and was fully developed by 165 BC when the book of Daniel was written. The authorship was attributed to John, the apostle, by writers in the West, while those in the East did not hold this view. The book is dated about 95 AD with parts written at the end of the sixties AD. The book is first and foremost a tract for the times, a period of disturbance and bitter persecution, to increase the hope and determination of the infant Church. This hope is based on the belief in the great 'Day of Yahweh' spoken of by the prophet Amos 5.18. The 'Day' is coming soon when God will liberate his people from their oppressors. When John wrote the Church had been decimated by persecution, Rome and its empire (The Beast) was only a tool wielded by Satan. The book portrays the basic realities on which faith relies in any period of history; God's promise to be with his people. It is this presence that has now been perfected by the marriage of God and his new chosen people in the person of his Son, Immanuel (God-with-us). The promise of the risen Christ, 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time,' is what gives life to the Church. The reading, 11.19-12.1-6,10 begins with a vision of the ark of the covenant in heaven, this is the new covenant the permanent home of God's presence among his people. We now have the vision of the woman, crowned with stars, who is 'in the pangs of childbirth.' Then a second sign in the heavens, a red dragon who, in Jewish tradition, represented the power of evil, hostile to God and his people. The dragon wreaks havoc in the heavens and is ready to eat the child the woman is about to bear. The woman is delivered of a boy, the Messiah, leader of the new Israel, who 'was taken straight up to God and to his throne.' The child's triumph is here described immediately after its birth. The woman escapes to the desert the traditional Old Testament place of refuge for the persecuted. The reading ends with a proclamation from heaven of victory over the dragon which is what the child was born to achieve.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 44. 10-12,16, is a royal wedding song which in Jewish/Christian tradition celebrates the marriage of the messianic king with Israel/the Church. On this feast the words are applied to the woman, our Lady, who gave birth to the One who has

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, marriage and virginity, liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, charisms, matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to turn use all these problems into a vehicle for the profound doctrine of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross which is the one true wisdom.

The reading, 15.20-26, is from the chapter in which Paul teaches about the resurrection from the dead. Paul compares Christ with Adam who brought death so 'all die in Adam.' Christ by his resurrection overcame death 'so in Christ all will be brought to life' that is, a risen life in justice and love. When the end comes Christ with all those who belong to him will hand over is kingdom to God the Father having destroyed all forces hostile to the sovereignty of God



On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which the Church celebrates every year on August 15. Simply put, the dogma of the Assumption states that at the end of her life, the Blessed Virgin Mary was taken, body and soul, into heaven. While this event isn't reflected in Sacred Scripture, it is clearly part of the Church's earliest observance. In the sixth century, St. John Damascene wrote in one of his sermons, "Your sacred and happy soul, as nature will have it, was separated in death from your most blessed and immaculate body, and although the body was duly interred, it did not remain in the state of death, neither was it dissolved by decay; your most pure and sinless body was not left on earth, but you were transferred to your heavenly throne."

Theologically speaking, death is often understood to be a consequence of original sin. Since Mary was conceived without Original Sin, some theologians have wondered if Mary died or if perhaps she was taken into heaven without experiencing death. The Catechism of the Catholic Church doesn't answer this question but simply states, "The most blessed Virgin Mary, when the course

of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven" (no. 974). The Solemnity of the Assumption reminds us of the unique role that Mary served in the process of our salvation. Although she was without sin, we have the possibility of receiving God's forgiveness for our sins through Christ. Her entry into heaven prefigures our own hope of experiencing the same eternal life. Ordinarily, the celebration of the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a holy day of obligation for Catholics, but when it falls on a Saturday or a Monday, that obligation to attend Mass is lifted.



Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, You have destroyed the power of death and given the hope of eternal life for body and soul. You granted your Mother a special place in your glory, and did not allow decay to touch her body. As we rejoice in the Assumption of Mary, grant us renewed confidence in the victory of life over death. **Amen.**

Mary, Queen Assumed into Heaven, I rejoice that after years of heroic martyrdom on earth, you have at last been taken to the throne prepared for you in heaven by the Holy Trinity.

Lift my heart with you in the glory of your Assumption above the dreadful touch of sin and impurity. Teach me how small earth becomes when viewed from heaven. Make me realize that death is the triumphant gate through which I shall pass to your Son, and that someday my body shall re-join my soul in the unending bliss of heaven.

From this earth, over which I tread as a pilgrim, I look to you for help. I ask for this favour: **(Mention your request).**

When my hour of death has come, lead me safely to the presence of Jesus to enjoy the vision of my God for all eternity together with you.