

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

THE ASSUMPTION: HER GLORY, OUR HOPE

“When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Lk. 1. 41)

The is Sunday, we celebrate to Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, instead of the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A. Why is that? This feast is a solemnity and one of the Holy Days of Obligation, when we, Catholics, are required to attend Mass, and abstain from serious labour. It is a movable feast, which means that the Bishops of a “particular Church” have the right to celebrate it on the nearest Sunday, when it does not fall on a Sunday. On such occasions, as this, the Solemnity takes precedence over the Sunday celebration.

Concerning the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we have to say that this celebration was dogmatically defined on 1st November, 1950 by Pope Pius XII in the Dogmatic Constitution, *Munificentissimus Deus*. Defining this dogma as revealed truth, the great Saint Pope Pius XII wrote: “we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory” (MD. 44). This is the teaching of the Church that we celebrate today. In the light of this, the Constitution of the Second Vatican Council states: “the immaculate Virgin preserved free from all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things” (no. 59). She is the Queen of Heaven and Earth. This what we teach. This is what we believe. This is what we practice. For those who do not believe, this is a controversy; but for us, this is a true teaching that encourages and challenges us to aspire to live a life of obedience and total surrender to the will of God in our lives as our Blessed Mother did. For just as our Blessed was rewarded with the glory of heaven, so too shall we all be rewarded after our earthly life is over. This is the hope of all the baptised that “we may merit to be sharers of her glory.”

The Assumption of our Blessed Mother is founded on the Incarnation of Christ. Since Christ was to be born in human form and assume human nature (Phil. 2: 7), it was necessary that The One through whom Christ would be born should be pure

and spotless, freed from original sin of Adam. Mary therefore was preserved from original sin, made the New Earth to give birth to the New Adam so that He would be greater than the Old Adam, who sinned and stained the Old Earth with his sin of disobedience. It is only logical that She Who was not created from the cursed Old Earth be spared the brunt of its curse and not left to experience corruption as Psalm (16: 10) says: "You will not leave my soul among the dead, nor let Your servant experience corruption." God spared His faithful and obedient handmaid the pains of corruption and gave her the privilege of experiencing the glory of heaven. Whether she resurrected after three days, as the Sacred Tradition of Eastern Christianity teaches or she was never buried, the convergence fact remains that She was assumed into heaven after her natural death.

Mary as the Ark of the Covenant: In the First Reading (Rev. 11: 19-12: 1-6), the Ark of the Covenant was revealed to John. Remember the Ark of the Covenant had been missing since the time of the conquest of the Israel by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. The Book of Maccabees (2: 1-8) records that God instructed Jeremiah to preserve the Ark. He did as the Lord instructed him and hid the Ark in a cave on Mount Nebo, where Moses died. He said: "This place is to remain hidden until God has compassion on His scattered people and gathers them together. Then the Lord will reveal these things again and His glory shall appear in the cloud ..." (2 Mac. 7-8). What is the relationship between the Ark of the Covenant and our Blessed Mother? Why do we Catholic sing the praise of Mary in the Litany as the Ark of the Covenant? Scott Hahn in his book, *Hail, Holy Queen*, presents an insightful and revealing typologies to explain these. The Ark in the Old Testament prefigured Mary in the New Testament: the contents of the Ark were: The Two Tablets of the Decalogue; Manna and Aaron's priestly rod that budded. Just as the Ark carried these very important objects of the Chosen People, so Mary carried Jesus, who was symbolised by these objects: Jesus is the Living Word, the Eternal Logos, Who came, not to abolish the Law but to fulfil it; Jesus is the living Bread come down from heaven, He is the New Manna given for the life of the world; Jesus is the Chief High Priest of the New Covenant, Who sacrificed, not a lamb but offered Himself as the Lamb of sacrifice. As the Ark of the Covenant was the "womb" of these important symbols, so did Mary become the womb carrying the Lord, Whom they symbolised.

The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth captured in the Gospel (Lk. 1: 39-56) presents a template for further explanation of these interesting typologies. Again, Scott Hahn offers lucid insights. In 1 Samuel 4-7, we read of the conquest of Israel by the Philistines, the capture and seizure of the Ark, the affliction of the Philistines as

punishment for daring to seize the Ark and the return of the Ark to the house of Abinadab. The account of the transfer of the Ark to the city of David offers compelling parallels with Mary's visit to Elizabeth (Lk. 1). On that occasion, David danced joyfully (2 Sam. 6: 5), same as John leapt for joy in the womb of Elizabeth (Lk. 1: 44); David queried: "How can the Ark of the Covenant come to me?" (2 Sam. 6: 9), just as Elizabeth asked Mary: "Why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1: 43); and finally, as the Ark remained in the house of Abinadab for three months (2 Sam. 6: 11), so did Mary stay in the house of Elizabeth for three months (Lk. 1: 56). These demonstrate the relationship between Mary and the Ark of the Covenant revealed to John in the Book of Revelations.

The image of the woman in labour under the pangs of childbirth presents a painful, violent and threatening scenario. This image of the woman is understood as a symbol of the Church militant that struggles against the forces of the enemy, the ancient dragon that is "prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat" (1 Pet. 5: 8). The final victory reveals the triumph of the Church and her children through the power and authority Christ, who had promised that "the gates of the underworld shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 18). This is the battle that we all have to face while here on earth as St. Paul says: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6: 12).

God, through Mary, has revealed to us the glory that awaits us when we imitate her, the New Eve, who listened to the voice of the Angel, gave her free consent and conceived of the Saviour of the world. Let us be challenged to follow in her steps, to listen to the voice of God in the Scriptures, at prayers and at work; in her docility, humility and complete self-surrender to accept the Will of God in our lives so that we may conceive and give birth to good deeds shining out like the "light of the world and salt of the earth" that we are called to be. Only then shall we share in the glory of our Blessed Mother.