

## 15<sup>th</sup> August Year C – Assumption of the B.V. Mary

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke (Lk. 1: 39-56)*

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

She gave a loud cry and said: "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour: because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy - according to the promise he made to our ancestors of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

*This is the Gospel of the Lord.*

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- We celebrate today the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven.

Putting things more in detail, we rejoice and praise God for having taken Mary, the Mother of Jesus, body and soul into heaven when her life on earth came to an end, there to share in the life and joy of her Son as fully as she is capable of, and more intensely than any other human being ever will.

We should not think that what I stated right now expresses all that can be said about this feast; may the Spirit, through the explanation of the readings we have heard, help us go deeper into its meaning.

In view of the fact that Mary was to become the mother of Jesus, God granted to her particular favours which he never granted to anyone else:

- God loves every person that comes into the world, but it was only too fair that he should bestow special favours on the one he had chosen to be the mother of his Son on becoming man. We call these special favours, *privileges*.

*Three are the main privileges God bestowed on Mary which have not been granted to anyone else:*

a) To start with, God hastened to fill Mary's soul with the Life in the Spirit the very moment she was conceived in the womb of her mother Anne. We call this privilege "*the Immaculate Conception of Mary.*"

- Let us try to make clear what this privilege means. We all come into the world deprived of the Life in the Spirit, and we remain deprived of it until we are baptised. Mary, instead, was granted the Life in the Spirit the very moment she started living. Not for a moment was she without it.

But having come to this point, let us make the following point clear: *no one, not even Mary, is entitled to the Life in the Spirit, to sharing in God's own very life.*

Jesus obtained that Life for us all, for his mother too, at a very high price: through his death and resurrection.

Therefore, Mary too owes the Life in the Spirit to her Son, or in other words, *Mary too was redeemed by Christ.*

But while Jesus communicates to us the Life in the Spirit at Baptism, that is, after having paid the price for it by his death, he communicated it to his mother "in advance", so to say, that is, even before he became man in her womb.

We could put this another way: Jesus would one day receive his *human life* from Mary; he hastened to thank her for her future gift with his own, by communicating *divine life* to her the moment she was conceived.

*b) The second particular favour of God to Mary was her sinlessness:*

Sooner or later, we all succumb to temptation and commit sin.

God saw to it, that sin would never touch his mother. She was tempted during life, just as we all are, but she always came out victorious from her temptations.

This privilege too was granted to Mary in view of her being Jesus' mother. It would have been a shame for Jesus, who had come into the world to destroy sin, to see her mother succumb to it. The devil would never be able to boast of a single victory over her.

*c) The third privilege granted by God to Mary is the one we are celebrating today: to have taken her in body and soul to heaven the moment she died.*

[2. Mary responded to God's love for her with a total and joyful submission to his plans at all times:]

- Whenever we speak about Mary the mother of Jesus we might run the risk of making her so unreal, to consider her totally different from what we are, a woman to be praised to the skies but whose heroism we cannot be expected to copy. We might even think that with all the graces she received her life was super-easy! Juts fun!

And we are wrong: had we one day visited Nazareth and ask for her, we would have been surprised to find Mary, no different in appearance from any other woman in the village.

The special favours God had granted to her were indeed extraordinary, but they did not make Mary's life easier than ours: she was subject to temptation, to anxieties, to sorrow, to disappointment, just as we are. The difference between her and us lies elsewhere. Mary said "yes" to God at every step, while we, foolishly, often say "no" to God's plans of love for us.

Often: Mary had to say "yes" to God in total darkness, led only by faith, when God's plans did not seem to make sense at all; time and again, to pronounce that "yes" entailed sorrow, anxiety, uncertainty, just as it happens with us.

- ✚ She said "yes" at the Annunciation, submitting to God's plans as the "handmaid" of the Lord, when in spite of the words of the angel, so many things about her future remained unclear.
- ✚ She said "yes" again at Bethlehem, when Jesus was born in the midst of so much poverty, and repeated her "yes", her heart torn by anxiety, when told to flee to Egypt.
- ✚ She said "yes" to God at Nazareth for thirty years, at every event, sad or joyful; we can be sure that throughout those years, the Holy Family experienced many anxious moments, such as poor families have to experience everywhere.
- ✚ She said "yes" to her loneliness when Jesus left her a poor widow, to go and start his preaching; when news reached Nazareth that Jesus was opposed, or still worse, that his life was threatened.
- ✚ And above all, Mary gave her silent, yet decided "yes", in the midst of a sea of sorrow, at the foot of the cross, when Jesus requested her to take the whole of mankind under her motherly care.
- ✚ Not even after Jesus' resurrection things went altogether smooth for Mary: she had agreed to his Son's plans to be the mother to the infant Church, to bestow her motherly care upon it as she had bestowed it on him when a child. We can imagine Mary's anxiety when the Church was persecuted right from the start, and above all, when divisions arose within the Christian community or when she heard that someone had betrayed his or her faith in her Son.

Mary's Christian life was not easier than our own; yet God always found her exactly as he wanted her to be, always faithful, always open to His plans, always ready to carry them out as best she could. That is why we call her "*the first disciple of Jesus*", "*the perfect Christian*." She is for us both a mother and a model in our Christian life.

[3. Mary responded to God's love by joyfully serving her neighbour:]

The Church has chosen as Gospel passage today the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth soon after the Annunciation had taken place. The reason for the choice is a confirmation of what we said above: while we rejoice at our Mother's glorification in heaven, we should learn to see her at our side in our daily life showing us how to respond to God's love the way she did.

Let us closely examine the narration of the Visitation as told by Luke:

✚ Having learnt from the angel that her cousin Elizabeth was about to give birth to a child, Mary “*set out as quickly as she could*” (Lk. 1, 39) to visit her. It was a long and dangerous journey for a girl of her age, yet she did not think of herself but of the need of her cousin.

✚ The moment Mary greeted her cousin, Elizabeth moved by the Spirit, praised Mary for just one reason: “*for having believed God’s message*”, that is, for having submitted to God’s plans without questioning.

✚ Mary, in turn, moved by the same Spirit, burst forth into a hymn of praise to God, the hymn we call “*the Magnificat*”, (from its first word in Latin).

The Spirit led Mary to see: her own lowliness, God’s inexhaustible mercy, God’s faithfulness in fulfilling his every promise.

✚ Finally, Luke ends up his narration by telling us that “*Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home*” (Lk. 1: 56)

- You can be sure that her stay must have been remembered for a long time after she left: she must have started work the moment she ended her song of praise, carrying out the tasks that any woman performs when going to help a relative about to give birth: she kept the house clean, prepared the food, nursed her cousin when her delivery came, looked after the babe newly born, was at all times a source of joy and peace around.

When her help was no longer needed, she went back to Nazareth to go through the anxiety of being unable to explain her own motherhood to Joseph. She left matters in God’s hands and eventually God did come to her rescue, revealing to Joseph what had taken place in her.

The extraordinary manifestations of God to Mary were few and far between. For most of her life, Mary went on with her daily task quietly, accepting the joys and sorrows of life, putting her trust in God at all times.

*That is, God guided Mary in life as he guides us all, and Mary went on through it guided by her faith, humbly asking God for light to discover his plans in the events of everyday life and the strength to carry them out.*

[4. God responded to Mary’s faithfulness with her final glorification in heaven:]

- It was this faithfulness of Mary to God at all times that brought to her the glory of her Assumption into heaven.

In this Sunday’s second reading, taken from the first letter of Paul to the Christians of Corinth, Paul tells us that Christ is like *the first-fruits* of a rich harvest, a harvest of glory and happiness in heaven.

Jesus rose first and entered into his glory, but on entering heaven, he left the gates wide open, “*for those who belong to him*” to follow and share in his own glory.

- In heaven, the sharing in Jesus' glory is in proportion to one's own faithfulness to Christ while on earth; that is what "*belonging to Christ*" really means. And since no one ever belonged to Jesus as completely as Mary did, no one will share in his glory as intensely as she does.

In the first reading, taken from the Book of Revelation, we are told of the Ark of the Covenant in heaven and of a woman who gives birth to a child, mother and child being saved from a dragon that threatened both.

The passage admits of several meanings; it can also apply to Mary as follows:

- ✚ In the Old Testament, God chose to dwell in the Ark of the Covenant, a portable sanctuary which accompanied the people of Israel through the desert, on their way to the Promised Land. This Ark is a fitting symbol of Mary in whose womb Jesus dwelt for nine months.
- ✚ The woman too is a symbol of Mary who gave birth to Jesus; the devil (represented in the dragon) could do nothing against Jesus who was God; neither could he do anything against Mary whom God protected from the devil's snares throughout her life.

Thus the glory of Mary at her Assumption is the fruit of both: of God's love for her and of her faithfulness to God throughout her life. Her example should encourage us to *belong to Christ ever more decidedly* so as to share one day in Jesus' glory together with our mother. While living in this world and engaged in many activities, we shouldn't at all lose sight of heaven our final destiny. Mary assumed into heaven invites us to look up to heavens and long for it all through our pilgrimage here on earth.

And we pray with the Church:

*It were my soul's desire to see the face of God  
it were my soul's desire to rest in his abode  
it were my soul's desire when heaven's gate is won,  
to find my soul's desire clear shining like the sun.  
This still my soul's desire, whatever life afford  
to gain my soul's desire and see thy face O Lord.*

*Let us pray: Father in heaven, may the example of our Blessed Mother lead us to an ever greater faithfulness to Christ, that at our death, we may be taken into heaven, there to share her own triumph and that of her Son who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever. - Amen*