

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
August 15, 2013

Readings: Revelation 11:19; 12:1-6,10; 1 Corinthians 15: 20-27; Luke 1:39-56

Sometimes in life, the best answer is a non-answer! The question of what happened at the end of Mary's earthly life has occupied the Church's greatest minds for centuries, for the simple reason that the Scriptures are silent about her end days, she who was "blessed among women." On Nov. 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII affirmed what had been believed for centuries to be true, namely that:

"by our own authority, 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."¹

As far as we know, no writer before the late 4th century had ventured to speculate upon the end of Mary's life, namely whether or not she experienced bodily death—and for good reason. As one early writer put it: As far as I am concerned, I dare not speak out, but I maintain a meditative silence. The Scriptures, which are above human reason, left this question uncertain, out of respect for this honored and admirable vessel..."²

While Catholic doctrine avoids that question, it does dogmatically teach that Mary is in heaven, her body preserved from all corruption after death by a special grace. The same Epiphanius mentioned earlier was a vigorous defender of Mary's perpetual virginity, calling her "ever-Virgin," just as we do in the *Confiteor* prayer at the beginning of Mass. He described Mary as the "holy vessel"³ in which the Lord was carried. She, whose heart was pierced by the sword of sorrow, now contemplates Christ who is seated with the Father.

¹ Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1 November, 1950, #44.

² Epiphanius *Panarion ad haer.* (Medicine chest against heresies) 78,11

³ *Ibid.*, 78,21.

We gather today to honor this holy vessel for “the Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.”⁴ But we also gather today in hopes of gaining some insights about our futures and ourselves. Do you take much time to think about the future, be it yours or that of another? This feast, perhaps more than most, points us to the future rather than the past. When we celebrate the Assumption, we are reminded of where it is that God has called us to be—namely, with Him in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

We heard in our Gospel: “My soul proclaims the greatness of God.” Mary could not contain her joy and amazement, and her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. We too are called to resound with joy the praises of God. We do so in part through music, which lifts our minds and hearts to God. Our hearts resound with joy at the completion of our organ project, which will ensure that all generations to come will sing the praises of almighty God in the best possible manner. Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name give glory.” (Ps 115.1) Our voices and our music only serve their purpose when directed above.

We are given a beautiful reminder in the midst of these last days of summer of our need to remain firmly united to Christ, who himself “subjected everything under his feet.” (2nd reading) The Blessed Mother will intercede for us from her place in heaven, as the loving mother who would do anything to protect her child from harm.

God prepared a special place for His mother in heaven, to be sure. Let us marvel that He has also prepared a place for you and me, despite our weakness and unworthiness. And our Blessed Mother is interceding for us so that we may one day be with Him in heavenly glory. This is our hope for which we pray and why we lift our voices to God in song, proclaiming the greatness of the Lord.

⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 2 February 1974, #56