

Solemnity of the Assumption

August 15, 2014

Readings: Rev. 11:19; 12:1-6, 10; 1 Cor. 15:20-26; Luke 1:39-56

The best things in life are certainly worth the wait. Have you ever ordered molten chocolate cake at a restaurant? They even say that this dessert requires extra time, so you order it knowing that dinner will take longer. But somehow, you just don't seem to mind!

Today's Feast of the Assumption, celebrated this year on a beautiful summer day, is a key component of our Catholic Faith, and has significance far greater than most of us realize. It also has its own preparation period that leave all of us in awe and wonder.

The Feast we celebrate this day was prepared long before hand, gradually unfolding as the logical extension of their growing understanding of the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and guided by the Church, Christians early on appreciated Mary's unique role and her relation to the Old Testament figures who prefigured her own indispensable role in the history of salvation. For example, in the first chapter of the Old Testament Book of Samuel, we meet Hannah, the wife of a man named Elkanah. The couple was unable to conceive a child, and Hannah poured out her troubles to the Lord God:

“O Lord of hosts, if you look with pity on the misery of your handmaid, if you remember me and do not forget me, if you give your handmaid a male child, I will give him to the Lord for as long as he lives...” The scripture in question continues, “...the Lord remembered her. She conceived, and at the end of her term she bore a son whom she called Samuel...”

God works in mysterious ways, but for 200 years the Fathers of the Church, theologians, saints and the Magisterium of the Church

have seen in events from the Old Testament various clues– a pre-figuration and foreshadowing of God’s working in our lives.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’s birth was prepared for long before it happened, through the promptings of the Spirit and the Lord’s covenant with his people. We can see in this heartfelt cry of Hannah a foreshadowing of the cry of Mary in the *Magnificat*, who also sees herself as a lowly and humble handmaiden of the Lord.

In the presence of the powerful and merciful Lord, Mary expresses her own sense of lowliness: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.” (Lk 1:47-48). The canticle hearkens back to the "humiliation" and "misery" of a woman from the Old Testament (cf. 1 Sam 1: 11), who entrusts her pain to the Lord. With a similar expression, Mary makes known her situation of poverty and her awareness of being little before God, who by a free decision looked upon her, a humble girl from Nazareth and called her to become the Mother of the Messiah.

I sometimes believe that we can too easily fail to appreciate the depth of preparation that went into the people of God, his chosen ones, for the birth of our Savior. This did not happen by accident. It was part of God’s plan that unfolded from the beginning of time.

Hannah from the Old Testament can teach us powerful lessons about perseverance in prayer. She was mocked because of her fervent prayer. She was accused of making a drunken show of herself. She simply replied, “I was only pouring out my troubles to the Lord.” We are urged to do the same thing, but not only to the Lord, but we are also able to pour out our troubles to the mother of the Lord who through God’s grace is able to hear our prayers and intercede for us to her Son.

The Feast of the Assumption is a feast of victory—victory of humility and faith over sin and pride. The Blessed Virgin, now reigns in heaven, body and soul; she represents for the pilgrim on earth, the completion of the human journey to God. Her journey is complete; she triumphed through the power of grace and her fullness of grace, and through her real and free cooperation, received her reward.

We honor Mary for obvious reasons, and this canticle, whereby we make her words our own, testifies to the special veneration for the mother of Jesus. The Lord looks kindly upon our humility when we entrust our lives to him.

The next time we are tempted to take anything for granted (a wonderfully prepared birthday or thanksgiving dinner, a beautiful garden, a clean house, an ironed shirt, etc.), we should note the preparation that went into that act of loving kindness. How much more then, ought we to reflect upon the marvelous ways in which God, through the prophets of old, has prepared for our salvation right down to the humble handmaiden chosen to bear the Savior of the world?

We honor Mary today, we pray for the grace to see in her a model for all Christians, and the hope of what is yet to come.