

Solemnity of the Assumption  
August 15, 2020

Readings: (Mass of the Day): Revelation 11:19;12:1-6,10; 1 Cor. 15:20-27; Luke 1:39-56

The Solemnity of the Assumption is a magnificent and joyous feast celebrating Mary's "singular participation in her Son's resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians."<sup>1</sup> Mary was a servant of the highest degree, and we honor her by this solemnity that celebrates the taking of Mary, body and soul to heaven, after her earthly life ended.

Mary experiences now what is the hope of any and all Christians. We are incomplete persons without our bodies. Today's solemnity celebrates that a human body can represent a perfect response to God's loving invitation of faith. Mary's "Yes" reveals what is in store for those who love God and offer their best to him by means of our lives.

In a sermon on the topic of the Assumption of Mary, an 8<sup>th</sup> century Church Father tells a story of some rural farmers who, while plowing soil, saw that a member of royalty was passing by, surrounded by countless gift bearers standing in a circle:

As there was no gift to offer at that moment, one of them was collecting water in his hands, as there happened to be a copious stream nearby. Of this he prepared a gift for the king, who addressed him in these words: "What is this, my boy?" And he answered boldly: "I made the best of what I had, thinking it was *better to show my willingness, than to offer nothing*. You do not need our gifts, nor do you wish for anything from us save our good will. The need is on our side, and the reward is in the doing."<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added)

It is better to show our willingness than to offer nothing. The Solemnity of the Assumption acknowledges the truth that our bodies are neither some useless appendage, nor the be-all and end-all of our existence.

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph #966.

<sup>2</sup> St. John Damascene, Sermon I on the Assumption, [149]

Have you ever wondered what our bodies will be like at the final resurrection? You are not alone—St. Thomas Aquinas pondered this very question, speculating that we would rise again in the state of our ultimate perfection, “at which the movement of growth terminates, and from which the movement of decrease begins.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, at our peak. He was forty when he wrote that answer. Who could blame him? People in middle age often think back to when they were twenty!

What if we saw our bodies as our own gift back to God and treated them truly as a temple of the Holy Spirit? Today’s Solemnity recalls the dignity of our own bodies. Our Blessed Mother experiences the fullness of life, body and soul, with God in heaven. While we quite rightly speak about the state of our souls, we are a unified whole, body and soul, called to give glory to God by means of both.

As a pure vessel, she was freed from original sin by a singular grace. One of the punishments of original sin was bodily death and decay. When Mary’s life was completed, she was taken to heaven without the bodily decay that infects humans who are recipients of the effects of the fall.

We heard earlier a traditional Marian antiphon stating that Mary has been taken up to heaven; the host of angels rejoices. The passive voice was intentionally used— Mary was assumed. In early Christian art, Mary is most often depicted being lifted by angels on her way to heaven. She does not go to heaven through her own power, she is always taken there.

Our Faith teaches that “in expectation of the final resurrection, the believer’s body and soul already participate in the dignity of belonging to Christ. This dignity entails the demand that he should treat with respect his own body,” and also those of others.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, Supp. Q. 81, Art. 1 (Supplementum Tertiæ Partis) “The Quality of those who rise again”

<sup>4</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph #1004.

Today's Preface notes that the Assumption of Mary is situated "as the beginning and image of your Church's coming to perfection," and given as a "sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people." That is, it points to a future in hope for us too. This feast, while honoring her, provides hope for us.

This ancient feast also gives voice to the reality of how beloved and honored Mary was in the earliest centuries of the Church. The tomb could not contain the dwelling place of God.<sup>5</sup> She is now, where we one day hope to be, body and soul in the presence of God. We honor Mary's fidelity today and rejoice that she is with her Son in heaven

It is better to show our willingness than to offer nothing. Today, we willingly offer our gratitude to God for the gift of creation, including that of our bodies and souls. Together with the angels, may our praise today be a foretaste of what we will experience at the end of time.

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<sup>5</sup> See John Damascene, Homily 1 on the Dormition 12-13, PG 96, 717