

## The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Rev 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab

Ps 45 (44)

1 Cor 15:20-27

Luke 1:39-56

Today we celebrate one of the great Marian feasts, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, body and soul, into heaven. We Catholics hold Mary—the mother of our Lord, in high regard—as we can see in feasts such as the one we celebrate today being dotted throughout the Church year. Sometimes Protestants and other non-Catholics look at this respect which we pay Mary and think that we make her out to be more important than even Jesus in the Christian story. If you're ever in a conversation with someone about this, it may help to recall a symbol that has traditionally been associated with Mary—and which was referenced in our first reading—namely, the moon.

The key characteristic of the moon in this regard is that it reflects the light of the sun. It is the sun that generates light and supports life, but it is so brilliant that we're not able to look at it directly – our eyes cannot handle that much pure light. We can however, see the sun's light reflected in the moon. And another feature of the moon is that it sheds a little light on those of us on earth too.

So it is with Mary – her light is always a reflected light. Jesus Christ is the sun, whose light is reflected in the life of Mary. Whatever we say about Mary is meant to draw attention—not so much to her—but to Jesus, and all of the Church's official teachings about Mary are primarily trying to make a point about Jesus. Yet also like the moon, they shed some light on us as well. So what is it about Jesus Christ that today's feast of the Assumption points to? The fact of his resurrection *in the body*. And what is it about *us* that is highlighted in the process? The fact that *our bodies are made for heaven*.

This may seem a strange thing to say, but for us Catholics, *bodies matter*. Most non-Christian philosophies and religions think of the body as a distraction at best or illusory at worst when compared with the inner life of the mind or the spirit. Plato said the soul in the body is like a prisoner in prison. The finite material world was certainly not a fitting realm for God, according to most ancient thinkers.

And yet we Christians believe in the Incarnation—the fact that God himself took a human body—and that Mary carried him in her body. We celebrate it every Christmas. God was born of a woman, with all the humility and messiness that involves. He suffered intense physical pain in his Passion and Crucifixion. Such divine bodiliness is a scandal to Jews and Muslims, and is incomprehensible to Western and Eastern philosophies alike. Somehow, this crude, decaying matter that is our bodies is God's chosen instrument, and in his Resurrection Christ makes all things new – restoring the initial goodness of creation and even going beyond it.

Now, unlike Plato, Christianity does not speak of death as the escape of the soul from the body. Every Sunday in the Creed we say that we believe in the Resurrection *of the body*—a transfigured body no doubt, but a body nonetheless. Our bodies are not something simply left behind, but they are part of God’s plan of salvation. When the risen Christ ascended into Heaven, our human nature and form was raised to an unprecedented dignity. Christ promised to prepare a place for us too, and the Assumption of Mary is the pledge of this promise.

In other words, thanks to Jesus, if we make it to Heaven we will not just be like ghosts, but—in the fullness of time—we will be reunited with our bodies, and they will now be made perfect. They will not get sick anymore, they will be perfectly beautiful, and they will not even need food or drink to stay alive.

I have to admit, we men can sometimes get stuck in our heads with ideas, focusing entirely on the spiritual and the theoretical. Women generally do not have this luxury – not only do they get monthly reminders of their embodiment, for mothers this awareness reaches its apex in the gestation within their body of *another* body. It is perhaps not surprising then that it was a woman who first accepted and then facilitated the scandalous event of Our Lord’s embodiment. It is thus fitting that this woman should then be the first to enjoy the full fruits of our Lord’s promise to receive us—body and soul—into the place he has prepared for us.

In our Gospel today, Mary says, “The Almighty has done great things for me ... He has lifted up the lowly.” In today’s feast, we could say the same for our weak human nature and our all-too-physical flesh: in Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension—and as shown in the Assumption—the Almighty has done great things for us – he has lifted up what was lowly and made it fit for the new life of heaven. My friends, this is *very* good news.