

ASSUMPTION OF MARY

by John M. Samaha, SM

The Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary is a feast that traces its origin to the earliest ages of the Church. Tied to this feast are themes of Mary as Mother of the Church and model for the Church. In her, the Church witnesses the fullness of the effects of the saving death and resurrection of Christ for humanity. The preface for the feast's Eucharistic Liturgy attests to this.

Today the Virgin Mother of God
was taken up into heaven
to be the beginning and the pattern of the Church
in its perfection,
and a sign of hope and comfort for your people
on their pilgrim way.

The themes of the Mass prayers and readings, and those of the Liturgy of the Hours, reflect the basis of the Church's teaching about Mary and the many titles accorded her in popular Christian devotion.

The Feast of Mary's Assumption honors her "Dormition," as it is called in the East, her falling asleep in the Lord and being taken body and soul to heaven when her earthly life was completed. Mary's Assumption is analogous to Jesus' Ascension.

The similarity between the privileges of Christ and those of his Mother is in no way identical. Christ has his prerogatives by his very nature as God Incarnate. Mary receives hers by a free gift from God. "He who is mighty has done great things for me."

We understand that Mary is a creature only, dependent on Christ for everything. She is a woman and a mother, and her grace is adapted to her own nature and to her own special function. Christ exists for God. Mary exists for Christ. God made Christ our unique Redeemer. Mary exercises her role as Coredemptrix only through union with Christ, and she herself had to be redeemed by him. Christ is our necessary advocate with the Father. Mary is our advocate with Christ and through Christ.

This analogy is the work of the filial piety of the Son of God for his Mother. This was understood by the faithful from earliest times, even though it was not formulated until later. In the eighth century St. John of Damascus explained in regard to the Assumption: "It was necessary that the Mother should have entered into the possession of all the goods of her Son, and that she should have been venerated by all creation as the Mother and Handmaid of God. It is a customary practice that the wealth of the parents is passed to their children. But here . . . the springs of the sacred waters flow toward the height. The Son has submitted the entire creation to the dominion of his mother." Centuries later St. Louis de Montfort wrote, "All that is proper to God Incarnate by nature is proper to Mary by grace."

Around 1930 the renowned Marianist Mariologist and author, Father Emile Neubert, SM, expressed this principle of analogy with theological exactness. "To the various privileges of the humanity of Jesus there correspond analogous privileges in Mary, in the manner and in the degree required by the difference between her condition and that of her Son."

Finally Pope Pius XII solemnly defined Mary's Assumption as a dogma and an article of faith in *Munificentissimus Deus* more than six decades ago.

In many countries this feast is a holy day of obligation. In Lebanon, August 15 is also a national holiday observed by peoples of all faiths.

What meaning and message does Mary's Assumption have for us today? This doctrine and feast remind us of our eternal destiny . . . that we are made for everlasting life with God. This feast honoring Mary points us to our future and reminds us to live accordingly so as to achieve our goal. The Assumption of Mary also teaches us respect for life and for the sacredness of the human body.

Queen assumed into heaven, pray for us!

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