

Feast of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

If we are hoping to follow her, we must begin in the same way.

Dear beloved parishioners, on August 15 we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption, 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.

The Assumption is a late addition to the church's official teaching though Mary's natural death was celebrated in the Orthodox church from the sixth century as the "dormition," or falling asleep, of the Blessed Virgin. In 1950, Pope Pius XII declared it a doctrine that Mary's body was assumed into heaven after her death.

Why do Catholics treasure Marian devotions and doctrines that their non-Catholic brothers and sisters do not? It is because, I think, the Catholic Church is trying to tell the full story, to proclaim the full gospel.

But isn't the gospel all about Christ and what he did and taught? Yes and no. The gospel is about Christ in the same way that the story of the Fall is about Adam. "For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor.15:22). That is why we call Christ the new Adam. The story of the Fall is not only the story of Adam but the story of Adam and Eve.

If Jesus is the new Adam, who then is the new Eve? Mary is the new Eve. Just as the full story of our Fall cannot be told without Eve, so also the full story of our Redemption cannot be told without Mary.

In the new order, similarly, both Jesus and Mary share immediately in the resulting consequences and blessings of the Redemption, the fullness of life with God, Jesus through the Ascension and Mary through the Assumption. Mary was chosen not because she was the very best human being, but Mary is a human being, so God would not have used her without her permission.

This is why, when a woman shouts out today from the crowd, "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed", Jesus corrects her: "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

Mary is blessed because she heard the word of God, through the angel Gabriel: Who, more than Mary, heard the word of God and did it? No one. She is the Mother of Jesus, but she is also his first disciple.

Therefore, Mary was raised before us as a symbol of the whole Church. In other words, the Church has boldly declared that Mary is in heaven, body and soul, a declaration that is definite and irreversible. It was a declaration not just on the authority of the Church but also under the authority of the Holy Spirit.

With this declaration, our faith in the saving power of God is reinforced. Mary is the first to be saved by the saving work of Jesus, and the first to enter heaven body and soul, hence assuring us that we too will join her one day.

At the same time, our faith in Mary's intercession is also reinforced, because from heaven she continues to pray for us as our Heavenly Mother, a mission that she received at the foot of the cross and that she continues even in heaven.

As Mary's Assumption was a reward for a holy life, this feast invites us to keep us humble, obedient and keep our bodies pure and holy. We are given an assurance of hope in our resurrection and a source of inspiration during moments of despair at all challenging times particularly this time of COVID19 and all temptations. So, like the beloved disciple, let us make for Mary a place in the home of our hearts. Let us offer her our prayers and ask for her intercession.

Mary found the way to heaven, and it began with obedience. If we are hoping to follow her, we must begin in the same way. And let us also pray with her for the salvation of all peoples. That is what her Assumption means. That is what being disciples of Jesus is all about. **Amen.**

Happy Feast to all. See you in the Church. God bless you.

Be Blessed and Be a Blessing.

Fr. Arul Yagappan, MSFS, M.A (Sociology), B.Ed.