

Assumption of Our Lady 2021

Luke 1:39-56 Visitation

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven which was declared by Pope Pius XII in 1950 in his encyclical called "Munificentissimus Deus". The pope asked the bishops throughout the world their opinion: first, whether the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary could be declared and defined as a dogma, and second, whether they with this together with the clergy and the people.

Out of about 1170 answers, only six questioned the doctrine, and sixteen doubted the opportune time of the definition. On the basis of this practical unanimity, the Pope proclaimed the dogma on the feast of All Saint 1950.

The question as to whether Mary died, was deliberately left open in the definition. The text speaks of the Assumption thus: "***when the course of her earthly life was finished.***" Some theologians argued that Mary's freedom from original sin also implied her freedom from death because death came as a punishment for sin. Out of consideration for these theologians the text remained non-committal. However, we would argue that Mary shared in all trials of our human family; hence she also experienced death, just as Jesus her Son died even though he was not under the sway of original sin.

The significance of Mary's Assumption for the Church has been expressed in the ***patristic tradition***, that is, the early Fathers of the Church such as Saint Augustin, and in the ***liturgy***. Mary is a model of the Church and for the Church; in the contemplation of her glory the Church celebrates her own fulfillment. The Assumption then is a feast not only of Mary, but of the Church.

There is no historical approach to Mary's Assumption. The faith in the Assumption is not based on historical testimony but on a spiritual tradition, the growing insight of the Church into the mystery of Mary under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Pilgrim Church continues to grow in its understanding not only on matters of faith but also morals. The problem is always practicing what we preach.

The text of the Dogma of the Assumption clearly express three features which remain inseparably connected with Mary's Assumption: first, the ***participation both of body and soul in Christ's victory over death.*** Second, the reason for Mary's glorification is ***her unique relationship to Jesus*** as his virginal mother, and third, ***her intercession for us.***

Even though the Church's understanding of Mary as our intercessor has always been an important since the beginning as in the upper room waiting with the disciples for the Holy Spirit, it was really with the development and popularity of the Rosary by the Dominicans in the 13th century that Marian devotion deepened and increased among the faithful

For the Christian today, however, the importance of Mary's Assumption lies in the second feature of the Dogma, and that is ***her unique relationship to Jesus.*** Through Baptism, we the faithful, also enter into a unique relationship with the Lord. Heaven has never been an arrangement of hierarchy but in our relationship with the Lord and each other. As children of God, yes, Jesus becomes our brother but our redeemer, our Lord and God, and our Spouse. Yes, our Spouse! This is a strange relationship to many who are frightened away because of a deeper commitment to the Lord. They are satisfied with a non-committal relationship as Friend or Brother and especially a Lord and God that is at a safe distance, up there in the sky.

John of the Cross specifically calls the relationship between our soul and Jesus a spousal relationship, which is really an ***all or nothing commitment*** from us. And some Christians are blessed to even get this personal invitation to a deeper commitment to the Lord.

Mary's relationship to her son may be Virgin and Mother because she is unique, but at some point, even Mary realized that her relationship changed from filial piety to ***spousal***, probably beginning with the Wedding Feast at Cana where she thought she could influence her son with her filial request, "Son, they have no wine." Jesus reminds us, "Here are my mother and my brothers and sisters. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." We are not related to Jesus through blood but through the Spirit by Baptism. Mary is the only mother of Jesus, but she is also spouse through her own spiritual commitment with Jesus, ***her redeemer.***