Spirituality
Scripture for Life



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August 15, 2018

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"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" (Munificentissimus Deus #44). With these words, Pope Pius XII on Nov. 1, 1950 declared the Assumption of Mary to be Catholic dogma. Even though this official declaration was made within the memory of many living Catholics, the belief in Mary's assumption was professed as early as the sixth century.

There is no mention of Mary's assumption within the Scriptures. But devotional piety, drawing upon the stories of Jesus, created descriptions of the event. In one account, Mary was assumed into heaven before the gathered apostles. But Thomas was not present and did not believe what the other apostles told him (just as he failed to believe when the risen Christ first appeared to the apostles). So Mary dropped her girdle down from heaven. Thomas saw it and believed. By presenting Mary's assumption as a mirroring of Jesus' resurrection, this story helps us understand today's feast. When Scripture and tradition are taken together, they suggest that what happened to Jesus will happen to us, but to Mary first.

1 Cor 15:20-27

Understanding Mary's assumption begins with today's second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. It forcibly lays out the significance of Jesus' resurrection. The Corinthians claimed Jesus as Lord and the source of life. But some of them felt that Jesus' bodily resurrection was marginal to the Gospel. As cultured Greeks, they emphasized the spiritual message of faith and dismissed the value of the material body. They placed no hope in the future bodily resurrection of the dead. When Paul hears that some in the community dismiss Jesus' resurrection, he explodes. In what is possibly the strongest correction to be found in his letters, he insists: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty too is our preaching; empty, too, your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:13-14).

Paul goes on to explain why the resurrection of the dead is constitutive of the Gospel. The second coming of Christ is essential to our faith because at that moment Jesus will destroy everything that is contrary to God's will. The evil of "every sovereignty and every authority and power" will be eliminated. And "the last enemy to be destroyed is death." Once everything opposed to God's love is defeated, "then comes the end, when [Jesus] hands over the kingdom to his God and Father." The destruction of evil by Christ on the last day will finally establish the kingdom of God. Just as Jesus has already entered that kingdom through his resurrection, those who belong to Jesus will enter the kingdom through a like resurrection when Jesus returns in glory. This is why Paul calls Jesus "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Our resurrection is essentially linked to his. He is the first to be raised up. We will follow.

Paul's argument is complex, but it is crucial to understand it. The kingdom of God has begun in Jesus' resurrection. But its final fulfillment will not occur until all who believe are themselves raised bodily into a new life. Then all that God has made will be transformed into a new creation. We await then the transformation of our bodies so as to share with Christ in a new world of peace and love.

Once we appreciate this mystery, we can return to the assumption of Mary. Mary is not divine. She is fully human like us. And like us, her entry into God's kingdom depends upon Jesus' resurrection. Because he has been raised up, she will also be bodily resurrected. But unlike us, Mary does not need to wait until the last day. Because of her unique role as the mother of Jesus and in Christian belief "the Mother of God," she by a special grace of God has already been raised up and has entered God's kingdom. In this sense, the assumption of Mary is the resurrection of Mary. Her risen body is with Jesus' risen body in the new creation we will all enter on the last day. Mary's glory is a foretaste of our glory. Christ's resurrection leads the way, and we will follow — but Mary proceeds us.

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

Similar to Paul's assertions in 1 Corinthians 15, the Book of Revelation focuses on the final triumph of Christ on the last day. The book ends with the cry: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20). Throughout the book, the author John of Patmos presents in vivid and fantastic imagery the battle that the risen Christ wages against the evil of the present world. For John, that evil is personified in the brutality and greed of the Roman Empire, but the enemies that attack Christ include every evil that opposes God's rule.

In today's first reading, three characters hold the stage: a woman clothed with the sun, the child to whom she gives birth, and a huge red dragon whose tail sweeps away a third of the stars in the sky. The dragon represents Satan, the one who controls all the evil of the world. The child is Christ, the Savior. The dragon seeks to devour the child because he will bring Satan's rule to an end. Yet the child is "caught up to God and his throne." This image is an allusion to Christ's resurrection. Jesus is raised up and now sits at the right hand of the Father. Who then is the woman? To John of Patmos, she is the church, those who believe in Christ and his resurrection. When Christ is raised up, the church flees to the desert where God protects her from Satan until Christ's return.

Tradition has seen in the woman of this passage a reference to Mary. The connection is fitting in light of the meaning of the Resurrection we have already examined. Mary is like us, a part of the church. She like us depends on Jesus' resurrection and God's protection. But the belief in her assumption places her at the head of those who are raised. She is the personification of the church, the first of believers to enter the kingdom.

Ps 45:10, 11, 12, 16

Most likely, Psalm 45 was originally a wedding song used in the Temple in Jerusalem as a king of David's line was married to a Phoenician princess from Tyre. The majority of the psalm centers on the Davidic king, praising him for his fair speech, skill in battle, and commitment to justice. In light of today's feast, the Lectionary focuses on the end of the psalm as the princess bride is brought before the king to stand at his right, arrayed in gold. Her beauty is a sign of the future prosperity of the royal house.

With the end of the monarchy in Israel, this psalm was preserved and used to describe the expected Messiah. From a Christian perspective, that Messiah is Jesus. Through Jesus' resurrection, he has initiated God's eternal reign. The queen who stands at his right in glory can be seen as Mary, who through her assumption has already entered God's kingdom.

Lk 1:39-56

The Gospel for today's feast may seem out of place with the other readings. There is no mention of the Jesus' resurrection, no implication of Mary's assumption, no battle with Satan, and no one arrayed in gold. There is simply a meeting between two pregnant women, Mary and Elizabeth. We might be inclined to dismiss this passage as secondary to the other weightier themes we have already considered. But the purpose of this simple story is to witness to the importance of the ordinary. That is significant, because the ordinary does not only comprise the majority of our lives; it is often the most important part of our lives.

We tend to remember the dramatic moments we have experienced: the day we met our spouse, the birth of a child, or the death of a parent. But most of our days are similar to Mary's visit with Elizabeth. They do not change the course of history, but they may bind us to others in friendship and love. That is no small matter, because at the end of our lives it will likely be the ordinary days that determine who we are. In this story, Mary is our model of how to live normal days. When Mary hears that Elizabeth is pregnant, she leaves behind her own concerns and affairs and asks, "What does my cousin Elizabeth need?" When a visit seems appropriate, Mary acts. She runs in haste to the hill country to visit her cousin.

Asking and acting is the pattern for ordinary time. Asking is not easy, because we need to move beyond our own preoccupations and schedules and place ourselves in the life of another. We have to imagine what good action would be a blessing to someone else: What does my 8-year-old son need from me? What does my spouse desire? How could I make my mother's life easier? How can I be present to a friend who just lost a parent? Acting is important. But acting will not happen unless we make the space in our life to ask.

There are a handful of highlights in our lives we will always remember. But on most days, we are called to follow Mary's example of asking what people need and then acting on the answer we receive. As simple as this pattern is, the result is often more than we imagine. When we follow the pattern of the pregnant Mary, we not only bring ourselves to others. We also carry Christ who is within us to everyone we serve.

Prayers: Assumption of Mary

By: Sue Robb

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of Ordinary Time, the church offers us a glimpse of eternal life in today's Feast of the Assumption. Mary's bodily assumption into heaven gives hope that one day our human bodies and divine souls will live as one in heaven's perfect light.

PENITENTIAL ACT

- Lord Jesus, you came to Earth through the yes of a young woman. Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, fully human and fully divine, you are our model of perfect love and perfect living. Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, we await the day when our bodies and souls are united with you and your mother in heaven. Lord, have mercy.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Recognizing that all life must die to rise to new life, we lift up our petitions, confident that God's loving response will guide, sustain and transform us and our world.

Minister For the universal church and her ministers: May the faith we profess always proclaim the greatness of the Lord ... we pray,

- For the mighty who sit on thrones of earthly power: May they rule with justice and mercy and may we work tirelessly to enact laws that protect and lift up the lowly ... we pray,
- For those in prison, for their victims and for all of us in need of forgiveness: May God's promise of mercy soothe our guilt and pain and turn our hearts to forgive those who have hurt us ... we pray,
- For all first responders, care givers and those who are sick in mind, body and spirit: May God's healing love strengthen them ... we pray,

- For all who have died due to violence; and for our family members and friends who have gone before us: May we one day be united with them in mind, body and soul ... we pray,

Presider Blessed are we who see ourselves in the suffering and injustices of this world, and who work to alleviate others' pain. We entrust these petitions and those we hold in our hearts to God, confident that God will answer our prayers and give us the strength, wisdom and resources we need to respond to our world's needs. This we ask, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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