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## Mary's Assumption: Hear, listen, keep the word of God

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The Peace Pulpit

We gather together obviously with great joy to celebrate the feast today: the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven. Mary, according to the feast that we celebrate, went immediately through death to new life without her body falling into decay and being buried. And of course it was a significant blessing for her -- a sign of her unique place in the whole story of our salvation -- and so we rejoice in this and celebrate.

But I suggest that there's a danger in this celebrating something about Mary that is obviously unique. It's like the Immaculate Conception, also something unique: Mary without sin from the very first moment of her existence. The Assumption of things might tend to make Mary seem somewhat exalted far above us -- someone we could never expect to imitate or follow -- and that's why I think it's especially important today to listen deeply to God's word because we can have Mary as our model.

And we must  
Psalm 45:10, 11, 12, 16

Back at the time of the Vatican Council the bishops gathered there had a very significant debate over a period of time. Some bishops wanted to insert into the council a separate document about Mary describing all of those things that make Mary very special in our church's life and in our whole story of salvation. But after much debate the bishops finally decided: No, not to write a document about Mary, but rather to put a chapter into the document on the church -- the most significant document in the council.

And in that document they have a chapter where they speak about Mary as mother of the church, the first of the disciples of Jesus, the first disciple, and the most faithful disciple. And it's this that's important for us to set before ourselves as we celebrate Mary's feast day -- not that she is exalted above us as unique in all of human history, but rather that she really is one of us and the one who is the first disciple, the mother

of the whole community of disciples, the beginning of that community, and the model for that community.

If we listen to today's Gospel Elizabeth gives us the first reason why it's so important to think of Mary as our model because Elizabeth says to Mary (and so tells us): "Blessed are you, Mary, because you trusted in God's word. You believed in God's word and were willing to follow where God was leading you." Mary trusted the word of God within her heart. Mary was willing to follow where that word led her and so she is the model for us.

Do you remember the part in the Gospel -- it comes later in Luke's gospel -- where Jesus is speaking to a large crowd of people? They're all gathered around him, people can't get close to him, and a woman in the crowd shouts out so Jesus could hear: "Blessed is the womb that bore you! Blessed are the breasts that nursed you!" Do you remember what Jesus said in response? He cries out back to the woman: "Yes, but blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Mary is that disciple who hears the word of God and keeps it, so Jesus isn't putting his mother down.

Certainly she's blessed, but he wants us to realize why she is really blessed among all women, blessed in the whole of human history -- because she heard deeply the word of God and faithfully listened to it, followed it. So today if we honor Mary, the most important way to honor Mary is by imitating her as the first of disciples. This is what we must do: Hear the word of God, listen to it deeply and keep that word. There are many ways in which -- of course -- you and I have the opportunity to listen to God's word every time we come to a Sunday Liturgy, but during the week too we can pick up our scriptures and we can read and listen to God's word and find ways to follow it.

So each of us has a responsibility to do that, but this morning I thought I might suggest a couple ways that are very current in our life here as individuals, but also as a nation to hear the word of God and keep it. What's one of the most difficult problems that we face right now where there's a lot of anguish and anger and dispute and animosity within our nation? The question of immigration. As a nation we've decided to build a wall -- spend tens of millions of dollars -- to build a wall to keep people out.

Think about it. Can you think of any time Jesus tried to exclude people, keep them out? Did you hear what Mary said in her proclamation today? "God is with the lowly. God lifts up the downtrodden, sets them free, sends the rich away empty, gives food to the hungry." God welcomes the poor, the oppressed. God doesn't exclude them -- yet we have terrible disputes going on, people saying, "Keep them away." Here we are -- the richest nation in the world -- and we want to push out people that are desperate for food for themselves and their families. Do you think people would really jump at the chance to risk their lives to make that terrible journey to try to reach our country? They do it out of desperation and some of that desperation even is caused by policies that we have set and yet here we are excluding them.

Hear the word of God, keep it -- the word of God spoken through Jesus in his words and in his actions. When he was with that crowd in the desert and the disciples said, "Send them away!" Jesus said, "No, don't send them away. You give them something to eat." That's the word of God so we must listen to that, try to calm the atmosphere in our country so that people will welcome those who are poor and downtrodden and oppressed. Share what we have; that's hearing the word of God and keeping it.

The other suggestion I make: Here we are entering the tenth year of war in Afghanistan and what is it, the seventh year of the second war in Iraq? We've spent over a trillion dollars waging war, bringing devastation to Iraq, to Afghanistan and to the peoples of those countries. We've caused so much suffering. We've lost our own young people in this war. We spent a trillion dollars in war.

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Hear the word of God; what does Jesus say, the Jesus who rejected violence for any reason whatsoever? You don't bring goodness out of violence. He rejected violence. Instead he said, "Love your neighbor. Love one another. Don't just love those who love you; love your enemy. Do good to those who hurt you. Return good for evil." The only way to transform a situation of hatred and violence into one of love and peace is through the transforming power of love. That's the word of God, proclaimed by Jesus, lived by Jesus. Isn't it time that we listened to that word -- try to follow it?

Just this past week the House of Representatives was called back to pass legislation to make sure that 300,000 teachers in this country are not dismissed because of a lack of funding. Many people in the Congress opposed this legislation. It passed, but not by a large majority. There are those who said it's a waste of money. And yet we can spend a trillion dollars on war -- and it's a waste of money to make sure we have teachers for our children? "Let the little ones come to me for they are of the reign of God, the kingdom of God." That's what Jesus says.

Hear the word of God, listen to it and keep it. This is the message that we must hear today as we celebrate this feast of Mary. And if we do we can be confident that not only will we transform our world into the reign of God and bring peace and good things to people, but we can also be confident of this, what Paul says in our second lesson today in writing to the Christian community at Corinth: "Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first and the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

That gives us the promise that as we hear the word of God and keep it we will be that continuing fruitfulness that Jesus brings forth through his resurrection and the new life that he has shared with Mary -- that he has shared with the whole communion of saints and that he promised to share with us. If we hear the word of God and keep it we become those who share in the fullness of life that Jesus had made possible for Mary, his mother first of all, but for all of us who claim to be his followers, who are willing to listen to him, hear his word and keep it.

[This homily was preached at Most Holy Trinity Church in Detroit Mich.]

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