

Solemnity of the Assumption + 15 August 2023

Chron 15, 16/Rev 11, 12 + I Cor 15 + Lk 11/Lk 1

Today we celebrate the great Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady, or rather our belief *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 (Munificentissimus Deus, 44).* This dogma of the faith was proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1950. A lot has changed in our world these past 73 years; so what exactly does the Assumption mean for us today?

First of all, let's back up a moment and consider why we have holy days of obligation in the first place. These days, we know, a lot of people simply ignore them. So why do we have days of obligation in addition to Sundays in the Church? Well, I was quite struck a few weeks back when our daily Mass readings took us to the book of Leviticus, in particular to the list of feasts which the Israelites were required to keep in addition to the Sabbath observance. Each of these feasts had a particular purpose; such as, to teach the people once they entered the Promised Land to worship the Lord of the harvest rather than the harvest itself, to worship the true God rather than the false gods all around them, and to remind them of their need to seek atonement for their sins.

And while we now longer keep these feasts; or, better yet, while the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the fulfillment of all of these feasts, the underlying principle still applies to us today. And that is, each of the Holy Days of Obligation are meant to teach and to remind us divine truths that we so easily forget along the way, to our own peril. So many people today are seeking happiness in the things of this world, and yet find themselves always wanting more, always restless, never happy, and never at peace. That misery is not God's will for us. So in today's Solemnity, Mary teaches us where true blessedness, true happiness, is found.

In the Gospel of the Vigil for this Solemnity, Jesus reveals that the *blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.* And in today's Gospel, Elizabeth echoes Jesus' teachings in her greeting to Mary: *Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.* For the Christian, to observe and to believe are the same action. And so Mary is a model of the truly blessed, truly happy one, because she heard *and* believed. She would have heard the promises of the Word of the Lord, probably as a young girl, taught by her parents Joachim and Anne. And she believed that Word, so she was waiting for the Messiah, for the Saviour to come and restore David's Kingdom. And she kept believing when the angel Gabriel came and proclaimed to her the good news that the time of fulfillment had finally come and that, in fact, she would be the Mother of the Saviour! She did not shy away in false humility, nor did she not run in fear. She simply believed!

And as a reward for her faith, Mary received a twofold blessing for hearing and believing the Word of God. First, the honor of carrying the Saviour in her own body, making her the new Ark of the Covenant. And second, just as King David brought the old Ark of the Covenant home to Jerusalem, so God brought Mary, the new Ark, body and soul, up to the Heavenly Jerusalem, at the conclusion of her earthly life. And we can only image how joyful this reunion was, when Mary was finally restored to her beloved Son, after His own ascension into heaven!

And so Mary's blessedness, Mary's happiness, can be ours too. Remember, Mary was never wealthy. She only had one child, born out of wedlock (and I doubt many people would have believed her explanation—the truth!—that her child was conceived by the Holy Spirit). Her husband Joseph presumably died very early into their marriage. She had no grandchildren. She was not popular in her time—her relatives, after all, thought Jesus was crazy. And she had to watch her son be hated by the crowds and finally be put to the worst form of death, although He was completely innocent.

And yet she was truly blessed. She was blessed because through it all, she kept believing. And because of her faith, our Saviour was born into the world. Because she believed, she was given the greatest privilege of bearing Him in her own body. Because she believed, she was assumed into heaven, not having to undergo the decay of a sin-sick body. If we keep believing, in spite of all our trials, we are, and will be blessed too: carrying even now the life and death of Jesus in our own bodies (cf. II Cor 4:10), we will someday reign with Him, and with Mary, the Queen Mother, in Heaven, for all eternity.