

So what's the deal about the Assumption of Mary? Well, the Assumption tells us that in the midst of the chaos of our world, the evil that we experience all around us, and the doubts of faith that they produce, today is a reminder that God's grace and love have triumphed in our world. And something of the earth – Mary's body – is now in heaven. And where she has gone, we hope to follow.

The proper response to this is there in our Gospel, when after Mary has accepted God's call to bring Jesus into the world, everyone is filled with joy. The infant in Elizabeth's womb leaps with joy, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, and Mary sings this powerful canticle of God's greatness: "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly." God has triumphed over evil. As our first reading tells us, "Now have salvation and power come." It is right and just that we rejoice.

The Assumption reminds us that God has prepared a place for all of humanity – body and soul – in the everlasting life of heaven. All of who we are – not only our spirit and mind – but also our BODY – is given the wondrous possibility of being redeemed. It's why the church cares so much about how we care for our bodies, and that we respect the bodies of others. Because they are kingdom bound, destined for eternity in some mysterious, glorious way.

That's enough theology for today. Here's a piece from Brian Doyle which brings home Mary's importance in our lives – and the most common entrée for us as Catholics into our love for Mary – the rosary. He writes: "Your grandmother gave it to you for your First Communion. It came in a hinged box just like the one in which engagement rings crouch importantly. She handed it to you after the epic Mass at which you received Your First Communion. You were still dressed in your awkward uncomfortable first dark suit in which you looked like a tiny businessman or your rustling uncomfortable white dress in which you looked like a tiny debutante. Your new shoes were slowly grinding blisters the size of quarters into your heels. There was a reception in the sunny chilly back yard with savory foods you and your brothers and sisters only ever see at weddings and wakes. Some aunts and uncles gave you envelopes with cash. Two aunts gave you envelopes with holes cut in such a manner that you could see the faces of Abraham Lincoln on the five and Andrew Jackson on the twenty. Your uncle who was usually the most testy and snide handed you an envelope with a face you did not know peering out of it. Your older brother looks over your shoulder and says that is Ulysses Grant and you are now a rich man. You had never seen a fifty-dollar bill until that moment, and you have not seen one since, and there is a small shy part of you that wishes powerfully even now that you had saved that fifty-dollar bill.

You might have saved it in the pages of the Bible you received from your mother and father that day also. Your father selected it, and your mother had wrapped it carefully in shining white paper, and when you opened it you felt your father's right hand on your shoulder, and saw your mother staring at you with the sidelong half-smile you had loved your entire life since you became aware of it as an infant and thought of it as what people meant when they used the word love.

The rosary was blue glass, or rose glass, or black plastic, or white bone, or a deep burnished russet glowing bronze oak or mahogany. It nestled in a bed of crushed translucent paper. The beads were strung on infinitesimal metal links or tightly beautifully braided string. The crucifix had a tiny lean gaunt sagging Christ with his head fallen onto his chest in utter weariness and despair. You always felt bad for him when you saw him like this but it was hard to discuss this with adults because if you said something like *the poor guy* they would launch into apologetics or hermeneutics or muddled theology or a speech about how his death was actually Glorious, and he was Resurrected, and Our Holy Mother the Church Says, and etcetera and etcetera in

the endless murky religious blather of adults who are not listening to what you mean, and all you meant was that you felt bad for the poor guy, all battered and bereft and alone. Sometimes you dreamed of being a warrior hero in the ancient Irish mode who could go back in time and punch out the imperial soldiers with deft powerful sharp blows and break Jesus out of jail and the two of you would sprint into the hills and he would put his bony hand on your shoulder when you were safe and say *thanks brother* instead of sagging to death alone and haunted on a blunt cross on the Hill of Skulls.

You are supposed to put your new rosary back in the special celebratory box but there is something tactile and sinuous and riverine and finger-friendly about it, and you thumb the beads for a while quietly, and one aunt sees this and thinks you are praying and she spills her wine but we are out in the yard so it doesn't matter. Later she will tell your mother that she thinks you are chosen to be a priest or a nun because she saw you fingering the rosary and your mother will try not to laugh although it's a close call.

One of your small cousins reaches for your new rosary but you know that it will break into a thousand glittering pieces if he touches it because he is the Destroyer, and his slightest touch can drain batteries and snap spectacles and deflate basketballs, so you slip the rosary into your jacket pocket, or your new white shining plastic purse, and fend off the Destroyer with the arrow of your elbow, and he goes off to break a bicycle or a door-jamb, and the uncles all have another beer, because it is a special occasion and they are not driving and it's sunny, which is why God made beer, to be enjoyed on sunny days; Saint Augustine said so, you could look it up.

Much later, late at night, when you are in bed, and your brother or sister across the room is snoring like an asthmatic badger, same as usual, you suddenly remember your rosary, and you get up stealthily, and retrieve it from your pocket or purse, and tiptoe back to bed, pausing briefly to wonder if a gentle kick will stop that horrendous snoring, and you huddle under the blankets, and create your tight little cocoon in which warmth is trapped and you can hardly hear that awful snoring like someone sawing a table in half with a butter-knife, and you finger the rosary again for a while, with complicated feelings. You want to be cynical about the whole thing, because you are cool, but it's also a gift from your grandmother, who can be flinty but she means well under her glowering mask, and your dad had his hand on your shoulder, which is Dad language for *I love you*, and your mom shone that sidelong half-smile at you like a bolt of light, and the rosary is a river in your hands, and you do feel bad for the poor guy, and ever since you were little there has been something alluring and mysterious and ancient about the rosary being chanted and mumbled and muttered and sung, on the radio and in church and in the house; the unutterably old music of call and response, the back and forth, the twin halves of the Hail Mary, the forthright honest litany of the Our Father; and you finger the beads, glass or bone or plastic or wood, and you whisper a few Hail Marys just to take the rosary out for a spin, as it were, and then somehow without meaning to you say a decade, and then another, and just as you were dimly trying to remember which Mysteries are Joyful and which are Glorious, and what conceivable difference could there be between them, you fall asleep.

Exactly one hour later, to the exact second that you slid into sleep, your father comes up to check on the kids, and he sees you with the rosary tangled in your fingers, and he silently goes downstairs and gets your mother, whose hands are soapy as she turns toward him questioningly from the sink, but she knows him, and she rinses her hands and dries them on that old blue towel, and she comes upstairs too, and they stand over your bed for a few minutes, in the moonlight. Neither of them says a word, but they never forget those few moments, and even now sometimes, for no reason at all, all these years later, one of them remembers, and says something quietly to the other, and they both smile and feel a pang of joy and glory and sorrow. As it was in the beginning is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." (EIGHT WHOPPING LIES, p. 17-21,

slightly adapted) HAPPY FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION. Happy reminder that we are all kingdom bound – spirit, mind and body. Amen.

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