

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

15 August 2019

The celebration on August 15th of Mary's Assumption into heaven is one of the Church's oldest feasts – dating back to the earliest centuries. The Byzantine churches call it Mary's Dormition, 'falling asleep in the Lord,' and there is a large church in Jerusalem that has the title of THE DORMITION OF MARY. What has always fascinated me is that there are enough relics around the world claiming to be the true cross that we could build a great cathedral out of them – but there is not a single relic of Mary to be found anywhere. Why? Her tomb was found to be empty. And the early apostles concluded that Mary had been taken into heaven, as had Elijah earlier. Although not found in the Bible, this story is as old as our faith itself. Mary was fulfilled, utterly and completely, body and soul in heaven.

The importance of the feast is simple, and clear: God does not prefer soul over body. God does not prefer spirit over matter; the masculine is not preferred to the feminine; the female body is not seen as less by God. The ancient teaching is twofold: 1) at this moment, a woman – body, mind and heart – is one with God in heaven. We can say this about no other human being.

And 2), you and I need hope for nothing less. This is OUR destiny – this is where we are headed, this is what we live for – to be one day united – body, mind and heart – united with God. Remember we believe in the resurrection of the BODY! Mary is the 'first fruits' of the resurrection of the BODY of Jesus Christ. Today's feast is about fulfillment and completion, of promises kept in a time when so many expectations are disintegrating. We celebrate the glory that completes a life of faith of a woman who is one of us.

Mary's life and the fulfillment of promises to her are evidence for all of us that promises made to us by God are not taken lightly. We can count on them. I need to hear of promises kept and expectations fulfilled. We all do. I need to "acclaim the greatness of the Lord, to rejoice in God my savior....", the "God who rescues

the lowly, recalling the promise of mercy, the promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever.” (Lk 1:46, 54-55)

We can just be PROUD of Mary – because she is one of our own. She is like us, a human redeemed by the grace of Christ. Because she has gone where her Son has gone, we too can hope to follow. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says it this way: “The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son’s Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians.” (#966)

Today is a festival of trust in God’s tomorrow for all of us: God’s full and final reign. Mary, sharer of our destiny, touches our deepest desires for fulfillment in God. These hopes are brought together for us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The focus is God’s activity, not Mary’s. But she is the symbol of all we will be in Christ. For this we are grateful – and give thanks. And for a short homily we are grateful – and give thanks.

SURPRISE! AMEN!