

Homily 2021.08.15

Solemnity: The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Co-Patron of our Diocese

The Dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was defined in the Catholic Church by Pope Pius XII in 1950. It was most certainly not a new idea, and while not directly scriptural, the devotion and belief had been present and strong in all ages of the Church, right back to the earliest centuries.

The definition is rendered thus: We proclaim and define it to be a dogma revealed by God that the immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever virgin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven.

Notice that, quite deliberately, the issue of whether Mary underwent bodily death before being assumed into heaven is left open and unstated. Those of a more pious and mystical bent tend to say no, she didn't die; those of a more analytical bent tend to say yes she did undergo bodily death since she cannot be greater than her Son, and He truly died and spent three nights in the tomb. Both positions are included in the definition. (Note: the Eastern churches employ a different compromise called the Dormition, literally the 'falling asleep'.)

I could spend the rest of the homily pulling apart our readings today and examining how they apply to and direct us towards the Assumption. Such a task is not straightforward. For example, who is the woman in the first reading from the Apocalypse? Most scholarship says she represents *not* Mary, but Israel, the chosen race, from whom will come the Messiah, represented in story by the male child. The application to Mary is a secondary meaning; by bearing the Messiah in her womb, Mary in some way embodies all of Israel.

Instead, I will cut to the chase, and look at why the Assumption matters and makes a difference in our lives.

- Mary intercedes for us from Heaven. While fully human like us, She alone of the human race relates to Jesus as mother, whereas we relate to Him as brothers and sisters. Her intercession is powerful in ways beyond our imagining.
- Jesus draws his flesh, his body, his humanity ALL from Mary. If Jesus' body is already raised up to the heights of Heaven, so must Mary's be.
- The Assumption points us to our own hope in our own resurrection, and of those we love too. Mary is assumed body and soul into heaven. This repeats and affirms our belief that Christian resurrection includes the resurrection of the body. How we do not know.
- The human person is body and soul. Not a human soul trapped in a body that gets released at death. To be truly human in the next life requires a body. How we do not know.
- Our bodies therefore matter. They matter in this life. They are temples of the Holy Spirit. They are the way in which we receive grace through the physicality of the Sacraments – oil, water, bread, wine, touch. In the bodies of spouses they become the matter and form of the Sacrament of Marriage. Pope St John Paul II wrote extensively of the theology of the body, of the body as the place where grace and the material world meet.
- What we do with our bodies matters. What we do with (or to) another's body also matters. The body is a holy thing no less than the soul.