

Weekend Readings & Reflections

August 14-15, 2021 – The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Reflection: On this feast, we praise God who has taken the sinless Virgin Mary, body and soul, into His glory. In our first reading, from Revelation, we find God's temple in heaven opened and the Ark of the Covenant revealed. The most sacred item in Israel's history, the Ark had been missing since the Temple's destruction in 586 B.C. Thus, John reports some startling news. Even more startling is his revelation that the sacred vessel is now a woman, who is mother of the royal Son of David, the Messiah. Of this woman, then, we sing to God as the ancient Israelites sang: "The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold." In the court of King Solomon, we glimpse Israel's traditional arrangement: Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, takes her place at the king's right hand (see 1 Kings 2:19). At Mary's Assumption, as we see in Revelation, the queen once again takes her place at the right hand of the Son of David. Our second reading shows us why this is fitting: "in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order." What is implicit in St. Paul's statement is revealed in Revelation. The consummation of Christ's work has begun, as is proper, with the Assumption of the queen mother. John's Apocalypse shows also the fulfillment of our Gospel. There, Mary, pregnant with Jesus, retraces the steps of David as he brought the Ark to Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 6). Mary "arose and went" into the hill country, just as David "arose and went" to that region. Upon Mary's arrival, Elizabeth is awestruck, just as David was before the Ark. The encounter causes the baby John to leap with excitement, as David leapt before the Ark. And Mary stayed in the "house of Zechariah" for "three months," as the Ark remained in the "house of Obed-edom" for the same period. Mary is the vessel of God's presence, and she is queen mother. She reigns now in splendor with Jesus in the heavenly Jerusalem.



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our study for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us pray together the Angelus:

Leader: The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

All: And she conceived of the Holy Spirit. *Hail Mary...*

Leader: Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

All: Be it done unto me according to thy word. *Hail Mary...*

Leader: And the Word was made Flesh.

All: And dwelt among us. *Hail Mary...*

Leader: Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

All: That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ

Leader: Let us Pray: Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

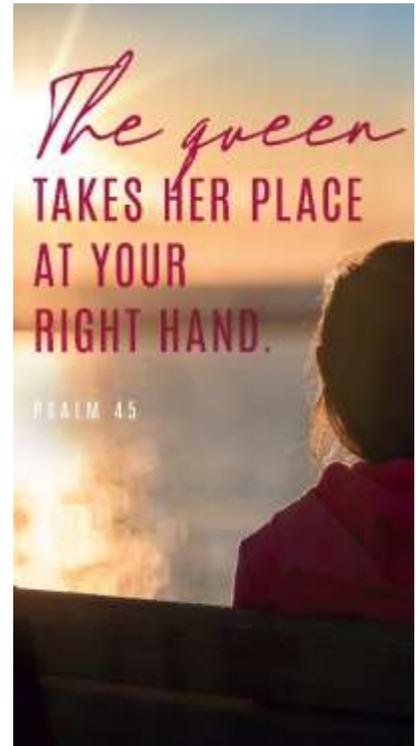
Leader: The doctrine of the Assumption of Mary doesn't simply mean 'there's something special about Mary'. Profoundly it affirms something special about humanity. Pope Pius XII asked all Bishops in 1950 if their congregations believed that Mary was assumed into heaven; 98 percent answered 'Yes'. God spoke through the sense of the 'faithful' to affirm Mary's assumption. It does not mean she never died but after her 'sleeping' or 'dormition' she was taken body and soul into heaven. This was celebrated in the East since ca. A.D.600, and in the West by that centuries end.

The Theological Virtue of Faith

There is a lot of confusion on the precise nature of faith. If asked to explain it, most Christians would probably talk about taking "a leap of faith," particularly when encountering a difficult doctrine or a trying period in life. By faith, we believe in that which cannot yet be seen - namely, the eternal life that God has planned for us. We believe that God has a plan for our lives, for "God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). Faith does not mean that we put aside our reason and simply "believe." St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that faith is an actual knowledge, albeit a knowledge beyond our senses. It is possible to know with certainty that God exists that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. Faith, which is a theological virtue, makes such knowledge possible. It is a pure gift from God, meaning we can't make ourselves have more faith, but we can and should pray and beg God to always increase our faith. We can also live a life that disposes us to be able to receive the gift of faith.

FIRST READING ~ Revelation 11:19, 12:1-6, 10 ~

God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have salvation and power come, and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed One."



- Is there anything that stands out to you in this reading?

Early Church fathers called Mary the 'Ark of the Covenant' seen in the first reading in heaven, even as she once held the fullness of God in her womb and in her arms on earth. The reading also depicts the figure of 'Israel' - God's People - His Bride - His Church and Mary as a 'type' or figure for the church and each Christian who births Christ in their life. The Church births disciples in conflict with the dragon who has many faces. The Roman Empire sought to crush Christianity, Jewish leaders persecuted the new Christian sect.

- Reading the passage with this background what strikes you? What face of the dragon tries to 'devour' your discipleship? How has salvation and the power of the Kingdom of God impacted your life?

SECOND READING ~ 1 Corinthians 15:20-27 ~

Brothers and sisters: Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the Kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for "he subjected everything under his feet."

On Special Solemnities the selection of readings seeks to teach deep truths of faith. St Paul writes of the first-fruits, the first offering back to God. Jesus rises first... and then each one in proper order those who belong to Christ. Just as Jesus saves us and cleanses us from original sin through Baptism, He saved Mary and cleansed her from sin from the moment of her conception. As an all-holy vessel she could bear Christ and give him the fullness of humanity. As she knew no corruption of sin in her earthly life, her body was not subject to corruption in the grave and Christ was able to bear her up to be with Him in Heaven. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death".

- What is your response to Mary being 'taken up' as a first-fruit of Christ's salvation? What hope does it enliven in you? What does the Assumption of Mary mean personally?

GOSPEL ~ Luke 1:39-56 ~

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever." Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

The historical site of the Visitation is in the small village on the outskirts of Jerusalem called 'Ein Karem'. In the Church of the Visitation there are large bronze figures of Mary and Elizabeth, their pregnancy bumps almost touching as they greet each other. A conversation happens between them, but also between John and Jesus. The First Testament meets the New Testament. Zechariah, the high priestly family, the Jewish priesthood, meets the new Priesthood of Christ. God's promises are fulfilled. The long waiting of the Old Testament is now turned to leaping for joy. The Ark of the Covenant, which King David leaped for joy before (2 Sam 6,5), is now fulfilled with John leaping for Joy before Mary, bearing Christ and the new covenant'. In the baby, and the disciple John, we see our own encounter with Christ 'hidden' in the Eucharist, and in our encounters with others.

- **What image strikes you the most? What could it teach you for your life?**

Mary's Magnificat is a radical prophetic victory cry, a promise of the reversal of fortunes for all who are saved. Mary is from a humble rural town, yet sings of 'great things done for me'. In Christ the world is irrevocably transformed. In this prophetic prayer we hear the mission that Jesus is to accomplish.

- **What does lifting the lowly, casting down the mighty and the 'promise' mean for you?**

MEDITATION

How strong is your hope in the promises of God? Mary is a model of faith and hope for us. And she is among "the first-fruits" of "all those who belong to Jesus" and who share in his triumph (1 Corinthians 15:20-24). There is a venerable tradition dating back to the early church which marks Mary's "falling asleep" (called the Feast of Dormition in many Eastern churches) and her heavenly birthday when she was received into heaven. Her reception into heaven is seen as a sign to all believing Christians of the promise Jesus made that we too would be received into paradise. At the last supper Jesus told his disciples that he would prepare a place for them in his Father's house. "And when I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3).

What enabled Mary to grow in faith and to persevere in hope in the face of obstacles and trials? The Gospel of Luke reveals the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in Mary's life. When Elizabeth and Mary greeted one another they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with a joyful anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promise to give a Savior. John the Baptist, even before the birth of the Messiah, pointed to his coming and leapt for joy in the womb of his mother as the Holy Spirit revealed to him the presence of the Anointed King in the womb of Mary.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to enable us to know and experience the indwelling presence of God and the power of his kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the way in which God reigns within each of us. Mary accepted her mission with uncompromising faith and obedience. She acted with unwavering trust and faith because she believed that God would fulfill the word he had spoken. Her great hymn of praise echoes the song of Hannah (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10) and proclaims the favor of the Lord: *God exalts the lowly and he fills the hungry.*

- **The Holy Spirit is ever ready to renew your faith and hope in God's promises and to make you strong in love for God and your neighbor. Do you live in the joy and confidence of God's indwelling presence with you through his Holy Spirit?**

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us now pray ...

ALL: Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and give me joy in seeking you more closely. Increase my faith in all your promises, my hope in the joys of heaven, and my love for You as my All. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

[Discussion questions created by Fr Frank Bird sm, Marist Priest, and distributed by www.maristlitynz.org, were shared with permission from www.livingtheword.org.nz.]

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