



THE ASSUMPTION – YEAR B

In the name of the Father +, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate the Assumption of Our Lady, the ever-Virgin Mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: we celebrate the great day when Mary was assumed, body and soul, into the glory of heaven where she was united with her Son, to share the fullness of his resurrection life for eternity. The dogma of Assumption raises two questions: what did it mean for Our Lady, and what does it mean for us?

When Our Lady conceived Jesus in her womb, she literally opened herself up to the working of God's Holy Spirit, both in her body and in her soul. Before that conception could occur, Mary's heart and soul had to be ready to accept the Lord's will: her heart and soul had to be a fertile seed-bed for the working of the Holy Spirit. When the Archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that she had won God's favour, it was only through Mary's wilful acceptance of the will of God for her life that the Almighty was able to do great things for and through her. Mary's will had to conform to the will of the Father in order for her to fully participate in the great work of salvation, wrought by her divine Son. This was no simple 'yes'; this was an embrace of God's will and a tremendous leap of faith for this young girl: it was nothing short of the work of the Holy Spirit within Mary, which allowed her to be open to his will. Mary had to put her faith and trust in God, and step out into the unknown.

And, as we know, this is what she did. But her life was not all joys: she might have thought that since God's favour was upon her that all would be well with her and her Son for the rest of their lives, but this was not to be. She realised as she stood at the foot of the Cross that those cryptic words of Simeon that he had spoken in the Temple at Jerusalem thirty years earlier were coming true. As she watched her only Son dying on the Cross, the sword pierced her heart and soul, as had been predicted. This, of all the moments of pain and worry in her life, must have almost been too much to bear: it must have seemed like her trust, faith and obedience had come to nothing; that they meant nothing to God, who could now allow her Son to die this cruel and shameful death. Our Lady must have been assailed by doubts and fears, all of which are normal human emotions, but what was so important was that she did not let them overcome her: she did not give in to them.

Instead, through the work of the Holy Spirit that was in her, she was able to persevere in trust, faith and obedience through those dark days, and rejoice in the resurrection of her Son; she was able to be present at Pentecost when the Church was born, and the Spirit was poured out to empower her mission and witness; and, finally, when her earthly life was done, a life of total obedience to the will of God, she was taken up into heaven, where her Son had gone before, to gain her reward for her obedience, her faith and her participation in the history of salvation. This is what the Assumption meant, and means, for Mary: her earthly work and witness being done, she received the reward of her labours, and, being preserved from

Original Sin, she was placed at her Son's right hand, where she lives to intercede for the Church, her children: and that is what we are: children of Our Lady. On the Cross, as he was dying, Jesus gave the care of Our Lady to the beloved disciple, and he gave the care of the beloved disciple and all Christians to Mary. This is why we confidently ask the prayers of Our Lady, as our Mother and our friend: seated at her Son's right hand, she pleads for his Church and for each one of us, that we might live our lives in faith, trust and obedience, as she did. She prays for us, that our lives might be conformed to the pattern of her Son, as hers was; and she prays that we, too, may come to share the rewards of our labours of faith and obedience to the will of the Father, in the same way that she does.

For this is what the Assumption means for us: where Mary, the perfect example of Christian discipleship has gone, we hope to follow. As S. Paul says in the first letter to the Corinthians, 'Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep...Just as all men die in Adam, so all men will be brought to life in Christ, but all of them in their proper order: Christ as the first-fruits and then, after the coming of Christ, those who belong to him.' Where Christ has gone, we hope to follow, and Our Lady's Assumption assures us that Christ's promise of eternal life is true. When we die, with all mankind, we will have to undergo a period of purification of our sins, because we cannot come to heaven while any vestiges of sin remain. Our Lady was raised to heaven, body and soul, because she was kept pure from Original Sin, so that she could conceive Our Lord in purity of body and soul. Where Christ our Lord has gone, we hope to follow, and the Assumption of Mary assures us that it will happen to us, as Our Lord has promised, if we keep his commandments and persevere in faith, hope and love all the days of our lives. The Assumption teaches us that God is merciful and keeps his promises: that the eternal life promised and won for us by his Son is ours, and has already been worked out in the life Our Lady, our example of discipleship and faith. But, to achieve that eternal life which has been promised to, and won for, us, we must live the lives that Our Lord calls us to live, by keeping his commandments of love of God and neighbour, and by following in his way. We have in Our Lady, the epitome of Christian faith, discipleship and obedience. By following her example, in obedience to the will of God; by opening up our hearts and souls to the movement and work of the Holy Spirit; by allowing God's Son to dwell in us, and in the world through us, we too will come to share in God's work of salvation, as the Almighty does great things for, and through, us. Mary was the perfect disciple; she was the first missionary, as she spoke of the conception of Jesus to her cousin Elizabeth; she was, rightly, the first human being to enter in the glories of eternal life, promised and won by her Son. If you want an example of how to live your life in obedience to the will of the Lord, look to Mary; ask for her prayers, and hold her in the highest esteem, for God looked upon her lowliness, her faith, her trust and obedience, and rewarded them with eternal life. May we, too, through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and through Our Lady's prayers, come to share in that promised eternal life; but, while we work out our salvation in fear and trembling, let us by our words and through our lives, with Mary, proclaim the greatness of the Lord and exult in God our Saviour; let us rejoice in Our Lady's Assumption, follow her example and implore her prayers, and, with all generations, call her blessed.

Amen.