

The Assumption of the BVM

Year B – Series 2

Mary's Assumption Into Heaven.

In Mary's gracious assumption we celebrate the fulfilment of our Christian destiny,
and with her we proclaim the greatness of the Lord.

(Readings: Apocalypse 11: 19, 12: 1-6, 10. A woman adorned with the sun standing on the moon.
1 Corinthians 15: 20-26. Christ as the first-fruits and then those who belong to him. Gospel.
Luke 1: 39-56. The Almighty has done great things for me, he has exalted the lowly.)

Jesus was never – is never – impressed with overtly sentimental praise. He accepted none of it, neither for himself, nor did he allow it on behalf of the people around him, not even those he most admired.

One day when he was teaching, a woman in the crowd said, “Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!” Jesus, being a loving son was, quite naturally, keen that his mother should receive the respect and recognition she deserved. But he placed the correct emphasis on her greatness.

Mary's greatness was not in the fact that she had conceived and given physical birth to the Only Begotten-Son of the Almighty God, as momentous and as great as that undoubtedly was. Nor was it in that she had nurtured and cared for him; he, ‘through whom all things had their being’. Her true greatness was in the fact that she had ‘heard the word of God and kept it’.

It is a given that today, on the feast of the Assumption of Mary, we honour the life of the Blessed Virgin Mother of God. But as well as paying our Lady, right and proper honour with this most noteworthy of feasts, we also learn a great deal from it.

Let me explain. It is one thing to admire achievement. It is quite another, to look beyond it, and to understand how it came about. For example, we may hear an accomplished musician, and long to be able to play with such consummate grace. If a man, one might listen to Andrea Bocelli singing ‘Ave Maria’, and envy such a wonderfully velvet voice as his. Or, if a woman, then it might be Emma Kirkby, or Katherine Jenkins.

Either way, all we see, or rather, all we hear, is the inspiring, magical, and apparently effortless, performance. What we do not hear, what we are not aware of, is the unimaginable dedication, and the profound discipline, the unstinting study, and all the hard work that went into making an exquisite performance possible in the first place.

In the same way, it takes a lot of hard work to develop strength of character. And it takes great discipline to achieve a firm stability of mind, just as it takes a deep, confident, inner strength to be truly tender of heart and generous of spirit.

All these attributes, all these graces, are found with Mary. Behind the tranquil beauty of her life, there was a lot of hard work and dedication. Indeed, Jesus sums up all these in one essential character strength. He tells us that it was his mother Mary's practice to, “Hear the word of God and keep it.”

This is the abiding, essential truth about Mary's life. And there was, there is, nothing sentimental about it. Life wasn't easy for Mary. There were times when she didn't understand the words of God. She had to ponder over them, trusting that all that he said was well planned for her. So, if we would honour Mary, as is her right and proper due, let us place the emphasis where it belongs, on 'hearing the word of God, pondering over it, and keeping it'.

The second way to honour a great life such as Mary's, is to emulate it, which is to say, to live our own life in the same way. If we admire Mary for the beauty of her life and yet stop short of the devotion that produced it, our words of admiration are little more than wistful, empty sham.

So how did Mary live? – Her life was centred around Jesus.

God the Father gave her his Son so that she would prepare him for his earthly ministry. She, with the help of Joseph, provided a loving and caring home where this could be achieved. She had faith in the divine power of Jesus. Her love for Jesus was so ardent, so complete, that she willingly shared in all his sufferings, even following him on that last painful, bloody journey to Calvary.

If we want to live like Mary our lives must be, likewise, centred on Jesus.

Through being familiar with the Gospels we get to know Jesus. And we, too, learn what he wants of, and from, us. Of course, there are times when he conceals his presence. And there will be times, as there were for Mary, when we are going to find his words difficult and challenging. But, like Mary, we must also place our absolute trust in Jesus, for there will be times when we, too, must suffer for him.

It is not enough for us merely to say we love Jesus. We must show our love for him in, and with, our lives. This is where Jesus placed the proper emphasis. – It is action that counts. – Remember what he said at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man." In the eyes of Jesus, the difference between the wise man and the fool lies at the point of action, namely, at what he does with the truth of God once he has heard it.

Our purpose today is to give due honour to the great and beautiful life that Mary lived, and to rejoice in her Assumption into God's kingdom, where she now reigns as Queen of Heaven. The only way we can do that is to follow the example of her life, and to place the emphasis where she placed it, in hearing the word of God, and keeping it.