

Homily: Assumption of BVM (2021)

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This Sunday we celebrate the glorious feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, body and soul, into heaven.

Mary's Assumption was defined as a divinely revealed dogma of the Church – which means all the faithful must believe it – by Pope Pius XII on Nov. 1, 1950.

Pius XII was not proclaiming a new teaching; he was merely confirming in a most solemn manner a truth about Mary that had been believed and taught in the Church from the very beginning. Here are the words of the definition:

“We pronounce, declare and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul to heavenly glory.”

Nowhere in the Bible do we read about Mary being assumed body and soul into heaven. Yet, Pius XII said that Mary's Assumption is divinely revealed. So, how did God reveal this to us, so that we must believe it with divine faith?

As Catholics, we do not look to “Scripture alone” as the source for our belief in truth revealed by God: that's a Protestant approach to the faith which began with Martin Luther, called *Sola Scriptura*.

As Catholics, we believe that in addition to sacred Scripture, God reveals truths to us through something called Sacred Tradition; i.e., the teaching of the Church handed down from the time of the Apostles through preaching.

One of the forms of this teaching, perhaps the most important form, is the sacred liturgy, and here we can look to the prayers in the Mass.

There's a saying in Latin, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which basically means how we pray reflects what we believe.

The earliest Masses in the Church in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrated her bodily assumption. These Masses date to the fourth century in the East and the fifth century in the West.

The *prayers* composed in these Masses reflect the *belief* of the Christian people, and these prayers were based upon the preaching and teaching that had been handed on to them from the Apostles. As pope Pius XII said in his Bull defining the Assumption, “*the liturgy of the Church does not engender the Catholic faith, but rather springs from it, . . . as the fruit comes from the tree.*”

In explaining the foundation for our belief in Mary’s bodily Assumption, great saints over the ages have used an argument from “**fittingness.**”

The separation of our souls from our bodies at death is a direct consequence of Original Sin. In faith, we believe that if we die in a state of grace, i.e., with a share of God’s divine life in our souls, that we will rise on the Last Day, at Christ’s Second Coming, in a glorified body – a body that will be like that of Jesus, who rose from the dead in a body glorified; a body that will have no hunger or thirst, no sickness or pain, a body that will never die.

All those in Heaven and in Purgatory (which ends at Christ’s 2nd Coming), whose souls have been separated from their bodies at death, will receive their bodies back in a glorified state.

It is then, at the resurrection of the dead, that all who have died in a state of grace will be fully redeemed, with bodies glorified.

The Virgin Mary did not undergo this separation of her soul from her body at the end of her life here on earth. (Actually, Pius XII never defined whether Mary died, but weight of Tradition, including modern Popes, say that although she did not have to die since she was free from Original Sin she did in die to be more fully conformed to Jesus who died; although they call her death the “Dormition” or “falling asleep”.)

At her death, Mary was taken up to heaven with a glorified body.

Why? It was **most fitting** that the Mother of the Son of God would share fully in the fruits of Christ’s Redemption, and be the first to be fully redeemed;

it was most fitting that Jesus should not permit the body of her from whom He took flesh to undergo corruption, but should rather glorify it!

Mary was always totally united with her Son – in conceiving, giving birth to Him, and at His death on the Cross.

As an example I will quote words from homilies of some ancient saints, who linked Mary's other privileges – her being Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception and sinlessness, her virginity – with her bodily assumption.

Perhaps the greatest preacher on Mary's Assumption was St. John Damascene from the 7th century. In a sermon he said:

“It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son [a glorified body], . . . It was fitting that she who had seen her Son upon cross and thereby received into her heart sword of sorrow which she had escaped in the act of giving birth to him [Mary is Co-redemptrix], should look upon him [with bodily eyes] as He sits with the Father.”

Another saint from the 8th century, Germanus of Constantinople, said “your virginal body is all holy, all chaste, entirely the dwelling place of God, so that it is henceforth completely exempt from dissolution into dust.”

A more recent saint, Pope John Paul II, in his homily at World Youth Day in Denver, Colorado on August 15, 1993 (at which I was present and celebrated the Mass with him along with hundreds of other priests), said:

“The Son [of God] took His human life from her; in return He gave her the fullness of communion in Divine Life. . . . In Mary *the final victory of life over death is already a reality.*”

The Church also looks to the Scriptures as a basis for Mary's bodily assumption. Although her assumption is not explicitly revealed in Scripture, it is there implicitly.

For example, our first reading for today's Mass: Rev. 11:19-12:1:

“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 12 stars.”

In the Old T., the ark of the covenant was the wooden chests, covered with gold, that carried the 10 commandments, the word of God written on two stone tablets.

In the New T., Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant: In her womb she carried the very Word of God in Person: the Son of God who became man.

The ark of the old covenant was a type – a future foreshadowing – of Mary, the ark of the New Covenant.

And the Blessed Virgin Mary herself is a type of the Church: The “woman clothed with the sun, moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of 12 stars” symbolizes the Church in its final perfection, its final glory, when we, the members of Christ’s Body, have been purified are united with Him in bodies glorified at the resurrection. This is our second reading today from 1 Cor., where St. Paul speaks of the resurrection from the dead, when at Our Lord’s 2nd Coming, “those who belong to Christ” will rise with glorified bodies and be united to Jesus Christ.

It is then that the Church, which is Christ’s Mystical Body, will be *fully perfected* – a perfection which the BV Mary has already attained in her glorified state. As the Second Vatican Council teaches: “In the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached the perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle.”

Another basis for the Church’s belief in Mary’s bodily assumption is from silence: there is no mention or record of her bones. As the tombs of SS. Peter and Paul and the bones of the faithful in the catacombs give witness, the Church from the beginning venerated the bones of its saints. The fact we have no mention or record of Mary’s relics speaks loudly in favor of her bodily Assumption.

Pope Pius XII defined Mary's Assumption on Nov. 1, 1950. On Oct. 30 & 31, Nov. 1 and Nov. 8 of that year, Pope Pius XII, while walking in the Vatican gardens, saw a miracle of the sun somewhat like that seen by the pilgrims at Fatima on Oct. 13, 1917: The sun appeared as opaque globe surrounded by a luminous sphere, and it circled about inside this sphere, shaking and palpitating. Many think this was a reward from Heaven for having defined the Assumption as a dogma.

While on this earth, we are in battle with the forces of evil, especially the Devil – as was Mary, as depicted in our first reading from Revelation, which speaks of the “huge red dragon” who tries to devour the Son to whom the woman, who is Mary, gives birth.

As revealed in Genesis, Mary is the “woman” who crushes the head of the serpent; and as revealed in Rev. 12:1, that same woman, Mary, is the heavenly Queen who reigns – clothed with the sun (the grace of Christ), crowned with twelve stars (Queen of Apostles), with the moon (an image of the Devil) under her feet.

As Pope St. John Paul II said in his World Youth Day homily:

“As Mother of the Church, you [Mary] guide us still from your place in Heaven and intercede for us. You lead us to Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, and help us to increase in holiness by conquering sin.”

Let us always turn to Mary, our heavenly Mother and Queen, pleading for her intercession that we may conquer sin in this life in order that we may be raised up on the last day to reign with her and her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

