

All-powerful and eternal God, who took the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of Thy Son, to heavenly glory in body and soul; grant, we beseech Thee, that ever intent on the things above, we may merit to be sharers in her glory.

Dearly beloved,

Tonight, as you know, we celebrate the mystery of the Assumption of the Mother of God. We know by faith that the souls of persons who die in sanctity, with no attachment to sin and no remaining punishment for sin, go directly to heaven. After Christ opened the heavenly gates through his glorious Ascension, all the souls of the just joined him there, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies at the end of time. For Our Lady, however, it is different. Since she was never subject to sin, either original or personal sin, it was not appropriate that she should bear the penalty of sin, which is death and decay of the body. She willingly suffered death, to be in union with her Son, but she would not suffer decay, for it was not fitting for the Mother of God and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lady's Assumption into heaven body and soul rests upon two principal truths about her: the first and fundamental is her Immaculate Conception. Because she was preserved from original sin by divine intervention and remained sinless her entire life, she was not subject to the penalties of sin, just as Adam and Eve would not have been had they not sinned. The foremost penalty for sin is death, the separation of body and soul, and because of that, the decay of the body, for once the soul is divided from it, the body cannot maintain its unity and fades back into dissolution. Mary did not deserve to die, for she was sinless; she died not as a penalty but in order to share in the work of her Son, who was also undeserving of death, but chose it freely in order to save the human race. But though she submitted to death, she would not submit to decay, for it was not fitting that her body should be destroyed by natural processes, since her body was never an instrument for sin, never rebelled against God, and more importantly, her body served as the source of life for the human nature of the Son of God, nourishing and protecting Him for many years by both her womb and her breasts.

The second truth upon which the doctrine of the Assumption rests is more of a moral one: that Our Lord would not allow his Mother to undergo decay in the grave. This is where we differ from the Protestants on Mary: we allow common sense and human sentiment to intervene where they would not. If God has planted in us a good and natural love for our parents, would not Jesus have had that also? Or was he so spiritual that he was devoid of all such feelings, and merely looked upon his mother as a biological entity giving him life and nothing more? Of course Catholics find such ideas abhorrent, and rightly so, for they make it seem as if the Son of God had a different morality than we do and that loving one's mother and wanting to reward her for all the good she has done for us is somehow wrong or does not befit a Christian. If it is good and holy to love one's mother, than Our Lord loved His mother perfectly, and since he was all-powerful he acted upon that love by preserving her from the evil of the soul which is sin and the evil of the body which is its deterioration. The body that had protected and nourished him, had sacrificed itself so that he might redeem the world—that body would not be allowed to decay.

As St. John Damascene writes, "From Mary true life had flowed for all men, and how should she taste of death? She yielded obedience to the law established by Him to Whom she had given birth, and, as the daughter of the old Adam, underwent the old sentence, which even her Son, Who is the very Life Itself, had not refused; but, as the Mother of the living God, she was worthily taken by Him unto Himself."

But this doctrine is not merely a fitting subject for our contemplation, it is also a source of hope to us. In the Ascension, our hope is increased because we know that where the Head has gone, so the Body will also. That is, it is not right that Christ should go to heaven and that we His members should never dwell with him there, just as it is not right that a head should be without a body. Though Christ no longer suffers, he does burn with desire that we should join him there, that those he has redeemed by his Blood may rejoice forever in his victory, that those he gave his life for should know the depths of his love.

In the Assumption our hope in salvation is increased because where a mother is, there should her children be also. My mother, who has come with my dad to visit me this week, would have been happier if her children had never left home. And for those who are separated from her, she is ever anxious for their peace and safety. Mary is that kind of mother. She is a good Jewish mother who wants her children to live with her, even when they're married, to consult her on all important things, to speak to her each day, and to involve her in every aspect of their lives. And since many of her children struggle on earth while she reigns in heaven, she is ever at work to bring about their salvation, intervening in their lives, protecting them from sin and error, and guiding them to their true home, which is heaven, but more significantly, home is where mom is.

It is a beautiful mystery of Our Lady that she shared with her Son in suffering the cumulative anguish of thousands of years in a short lifetime: she knew that she was the Mother of all Christians, the Mother of the Church, and so just as Christ foreknew all apostasy, heresy, and scandal that would be committed by his disciples and especially his clergy, so Mary foreknew how much evil would stand in the way of the union of her with her spiritual children. And that both saddened her and made her angry—sorrow over the sufferings of her children and the pain caused them by those who seek to destroy the Church from both within and without; anger that the eternal salvation of her children is so imperiled by such greed and selfishness and grave negligence and the folly of some men would risk the loss of one drop of her Son's blood.

So though Our Lady suffers no more, for it is incompatible with the vision of God that she enjoys, still her anger lives on, for she suffered it in all its fury and anguish while she lived on earth and it is spent as the years go by in the measure necessary. And if we men are aware of anything in life, it is that a woman's anger does not grow weaker with time, but rather stronger. And Our Lady's anger is nearly 2000 years old. Add to that it is the anger of a mother when her children are threatened—there are not words to describe it. So if anyone is angered over the current state of the Church, it is the Mother of God. As the Song of Songs says, "She is fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and as frightful as an army arrayed for battle."

The thing that separates her anger from ours is that hers is effective anger: it gets things done. It is not the type that wallows in self-pity or wastes time in complaining. Like Judith, she makes a plan and executes it, and she invites us to take part in it. She has asked us, in numerous appearances on earth stretching back to those at Lourdes, to pray and to sacrifice for sinners. Pray and fast—the same message her Son gave us when he walked the earth. So are we doing it? Do we imitate her, are we men and women of action, or do we waste precious time in detraction and despair?

She wants us to join her in this campaign, but if we are not willing, she will march on anyway and she will defeat the enemy. She has already crushed his head; in due time she will cut it off. And all those who find themselves allied with the devil, whether through malice or through negligence, will not be able to withstand her wrath. But all those who sincerely invoke her as Mother, even at the end of life, will be aided by her intercession. She is helping us even now, holding back further and deeper evils, encouraging the fainthearted, raising up clergy who serve her Son in word and in deed, protecting families who call upon her. And yet she also knows, good mother that she is, that suffering and adversity are good for her children, and so she does not wholly take it from us, but encourages us as we struggle. So when we get angry, when we are sad, we should focus our attention on her, and be intent on the things above by reminding ourselves of her power and her love and then asking her to act, and to act now.

On this great feast, then, let us renew our devotion to her and deepen our trust in her. She is truly our Mother, and she will not rest until she gathers us all into her home, the New Jerusalem, where her Son reigns as King and the Holy Trinity is worshipped and glorified. And let us also rejoice with the children who receive the eternal King for the first time tonight on this glorious feast; it is the pledge to them and to us that Christ is victorious and that He will conquer sin, death, and all evil in our lives, just as He did in Mary's life, just as He has done in the lives of all the Saints. May He strengthen us anew through His Body and Blood, preparing us each to face the evils we must face, to overcome sadness and despair, to have faith that Our Lord is determined

to save us even if the world should fall around us. He will not abandon us, and the Mother of God, in a mysterious way, will have no peace until we are with her.

I close with a prayer composed by St. Ephrem the deacon: “O pure and immaculate and likewise blessed Virgin, who art the sinless Mother of thy Son, the mighty Lord of the universe, thou who art inviolate and altogether holy, the hope of the hopeless and sinful, we sing thy praises. We bless thee, as full of every grace, thou who didst bear the God-Man: we all bow low before thee; we invoke thee and implore thine aid. Rescue us, O holy and inviolate Virgin, from every necessity that presses upon us and from all the temptations of the devil. Be our intercessor and advocate at the hour of death and judgment; deliver us from the fire that is not extinguished and from the outer darkness; make us worthy of the glory of thy Son, O dearest and most clement Virgin Mother. Thou indeed art our only hope, most sure and sacred in God’s sight, to whom be honor and glory, majesty and dominion, for ever and ever, world without end. Amen.”