

Vigil of the Assumption August 14th

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

Introduction

This holy day of obligation celebrates the dogma of faith that the Mother of God was taken up to heaven, soul and body, after her earthly life.

This dogma is not documented in Holy Scripture and reliable historical reports as to the place (Ephesus, Jerusalem), the time, and the circumstances of Mary's death are lacking. Still, the fact of her death is almost generally accepted by the Church Fathers and theologians, and is expressly affirmed in the liturgy of the Church. Origen (died 253), St. Jerome (died 419) and St. Augustine (died 430) among others mention the fact of her death incidentally. For Mary, death, in consequence of her freedom from original sin and from personal sin, was not a consequence of punishment of sin but a result of being a descendent of Adam and Eve. However, it seems fitting that Mary's body, which was by nature mortal, should be, in conformity with that of her Divine Son, subject to the general law of death.

The feast of the Assumption was first celebrated, according to historical record, in the early 5th century. By the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice Flavius (582-602) a Marian Feast on August 15th was formally added to the calendar of the Eastern Church which celebrated the sleeping of Mary (*Dormitio*). The object of the feast was originally the death of Mary, but very soon the thought appeared of the incorruptibility of her body and of its assumption into Heaven. In the West, St. Gregory of Tours (d. 593) is known to have preached the dogma of Mary's bodily assumption. Rome added the feast to the western calendar in the 7th century. Pope St. Adrian (772-795) changed the original title *Dormitio* (sleeping) into *Assumptio* (assumption). In the Liturgical and Patristic texts of the 8th and 9th centuries, the idea of the bodily assumption is clearly attested. Among the advocates of this idea have been St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Siena, St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Francis de Sales, St. Peter Canisius and St. Alphonse Ligouri.

Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950 promulgated by the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* as a dogma revealed by God that : "Mary, the immaculate perpetually Virgin Mother of God, after the completion of her earthly life, was assumed body & soul into the glory of heaven."

Direct and express scriptural proofs are not to be had. The possibility of the bodily assumption before the 2nd coming of Christ is not excluded by 1 Corinthians 15:22-24, as the objective redemption was completed with the sacrificial death of Christ, and the beginning of the final era foretold by the prophets commenced. Its possibility is suggested by Matthew 27:52-53.

There are 2 Old Testament examples of assumption: Genesis 5:24 for Enoch and 2 Kings 2:11 for Elijah. Hebrew tradition also has it that Moses was assumed into God's presence

(Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

1st Reading - 1 Chronicles 15:3-4, 15-16, 16:1-2

Mary has been called the "Ark of the New Covenant" because she was like the ark of the covenant made by the Israelites during their wandering in the desert. Both contained things which had been given by God: The first ark held Aaron's staff which had budded, the stone tablets containing the 10 commandments, and a container of manna; while Mary bore in her womb the incarnate word of God, Jesus.

For our first reading today we hear of King David's bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem.

15:3 Then David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring the ark of the LORD to the place which he had prepared for it.

The place he had prepared for it was a tent, in imitation of and as a continuance of the desert experience.

4 David also called together the sons of Aaron and the Levites.

The high priest and high priest candidates (sons of Aaron) and the priests (the Levites). Since the Golden calf, the firstborn is no longer the priest of the family.

15 The Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders with poles, as Moses had ordained according to the word of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 10:8.

16 David commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brethren as chanters, to play on musical instruments, harps, lyres, and cymbals, to make a loud sound of rejoicing. 16:1 They brought in the ark of God and set it within the tent which David had pitched for it. Then they offered up holocausts and peace offerings to God. 2 When David had finished offering up the holocausts and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD.

King David is neither an Aaronite nor a Levite. Here, he is doing priestly things such as blessing the people and offering sacrifices. This is a sort of precursor to the actions of Jesus who is of the House of David, and who is also the high priest of the New Covenant.

2nd Reading - 1 Corinthians 15:54b-57

Our second reading today talks about the incorruptibility of our body after the parousia, Jesus' second coming at the end of the world. This is a condition which the Blessed Virgin enjoys

now (along with Enoch, Elijah and, according to Jewish legend, Moses) because of her assumption.

^{54b} [When that] which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about: "Death is swallowed up in victory.

See Isaiah 25:8.

“Incorruption will swallow up corruption, leaving nothing of the former life behind.” [Saint John Chrysostom (A.D. 392), *Homilies on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 42,4]

⁵⁵ Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Hosea 13:14 is quoted with the insertion of "victory".

“Death’ here refers to the devil, who is being insulted.” [The Ambrosiaster (A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles*]

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

This is the first relationship of sin, death, and law in this letter but recall that in Romans St. Paul recounts that where there was no law, there was no sin.

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our victory over death is due to Jesus Christ. Because of His sacrifice on the cross we are able to enter heaven and enjoy eternal life. At the second coming, our soul will be reunited with our glorified body.

“Baptism destroys the sting of death. For you descend into the water laden with your sins. But the invocation of grace causes your soul to receive this seal, and after that it does not lead you to be swallowed up by the dread dragon. You go down ‘deadly indeed in sin,’ and you come up ‘alive unto righteousness.’” [Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 350), *Catechetical Lectures* 3,11-12]

Gospel - Luke 11:27-28

Our Gospel reading today shows how Mary was honored by the crowds while Jesus was alive and among them.

²⁷ While he was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed."

This is the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:48) "from now on all generations will call me blessed."

²⁸ **He replied, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."**

This is not a contradiction of the preceding statement but an expansion of it. Mary is truly blessed for having brought the Son of God into this world. We too can share in God's blessing if we live the Christian life.