

A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

There's a stark contrast between the first reading today and the gospel. Revelation gives us a scene that is violent and turbulent and aimed at destruction while the gospel is peaceful and joyful.

To celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is to celebrate life, both earthly life and heavenly life. First of all, we celebrate the completion the Blessed Mother's life on earth. Mary's life was a journey of faith, a journey of intentional faith. Mary stepped out in deep faith as a disciple of Jesus, receiving him into her heart before she received him into her body. So while we celebrate the completion of her earthly life, that reminds us that our earthly lives, our journeys of faith on this earth will eventually end as well. It invites us to ponder our own mortality.

But that leads us to the second part. We celebrate that at the completion of her earthly life, Mary was taken soul and body into heaven, where she is with her Son who once was dead but now lives forever and ever. This celebration also calls us to contemplate the life that is to come. This privilege given to Mary is the logical conclusion of her Immaculate Conception. Mary, by the power of God, was preserved from the corruption of sin from the first moment of her conception. That being so, it's fitting that, again by the power of God, Mary would be preserved from the corruption of the grave.

Mary is the first to share in the fullness of heavenly life soul and body. But the privileges given to Mary are promises given to us. As we will soon say in the creed, *we look forward to the resurrection of the dead*. In other words, we too, like Mary, are called to share in the life and love of God in heaven. This is something St. Paul speaks of in the second reading. It's been noted that you can think of how Mary, who has completed her race of faith and now stands on the sidelines encouraging us as we run our own race of faith.

So while the Assumption tells us something about the Blessed Mother and about ourselves, it also tells us something about Jesus. Through his death and resurrection and then his ascension, through his Paschal Mystery, God has broken

into our world in a new and marvelous way. It's because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that Mary was assumed into heaven. Just as a mirror reflects the light of the sun, so too, the assumption of Mary reflects the light of the Risen Son of God. The Assumption is the fruit of Jesus' resurrection and like his resurrection, it reveals God's love as a love that is stronger than death.

So the Assumption tells us about Mary, about Jesus and about ourselves. By considering the privilege given to Mary as a promise to us, this reminds us of our ultimate goal. The Virgin Mary is a model for all believers. God calls us to share eternal life with him and our goal is to follow Jesus and Mary into glory.

But the Assumption teaches us something very important: The Dignity of the Human Body. There is a God-given dignity to the human person that demands our respect. We're not angels, souls with no bodies. We're not animals, bodies with no souls. We're human people made in the image and likeness of God. Not only that, through God becoming human in the person of Jesus, through the great mystery of the INCARNATION, God enters into the world with a body.

Our bodies are important. How we treat our bodies is important. How we treat the bodies of others is also important. Our bodies are a way of revealing God's love. This message is important because the human body, the dignity of the human person, has been and continues to be under attack. The dogma of the Assumption was solemnly declared by Pope Pius XII in 1950, the mid-point of the bloodiest century humanity has known and after the carnage World War II and the holocaust.

Whether through abortion or capital punishment, through pornography, human trafficking, exploited workers, promiscuity, genocide, domestic abuse or many other ways, the human body continues to be under attack. What our faith offers us is a deep and profound respect for the human body and for the human person.

From this there emerges a code of conduct, a morality by which we grow in virtue and closer to God because what we do with our bodies is important and what we do with the bodies of others is also important. This code of conduct isn't easy but just because something is hard doesn't mean that it's wrong. To love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us isn't easy but that doesn't mean that it's wrong. And to respect the human body isn't always easy but instead of being wrong,

it calls us to a robust sense of responsibility. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary calls us to respect the human body.

Now back to our readings. In Revelation, we see the attempted destruction of new life. It represents what St. John Paul II called, *a culture of death*. A culture that looks to death as a solution. By contrast, in the gospel we find *a culture of life*. It's peaceful and joyful. A culture that looks at life as a gift. Virgins and old women aren't supposed to have babies but here a virgin and old woman rejoice in God's gift of life. In both instances these were, on the human side of things, unplanned pregnancies.

The celebration of the Assumption tells us about Mary, about Jesus and about ourselves. It points to our ultimate goal that we anticipate and receive a foretaste of in every celebration of the Eucharist. It reminds us of the dignity of the human body and calls us to persevere with lives of intentional faith in our journey to eternal life: the eternal life of body and soul in communion with God and in which Mary already fully shares. We too are called, body and soul, to share in that same life and love of God—forever