



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE SOLEMNITY
OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*St Thomas of Villanova Parish, Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 15 August 2009*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Today's Solemnity crowns the series of important liturgical celebrations in which we are called to contemplate the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the history of salvation. Indeed, the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation, the Divine Motherhood and the Assumption are the fundamental, interconnected milestones with which the Church exalts and praises the glorious destiny of the Mother of God, but in which we can also read our history. The mystery of Mary's conception recalls the first page of the human event, pointing out to us that in the divine plan of creation man was to have had the purity and beauty of the Virgin Immaculate. This plan, jeopardized but not destroyed by sin, through the Incarnation of the Son of God, proclaimed and brought into being in Mary, was recomposed and restored to the free acceptance of the human being in faith. Lastly, in Mary's Assumption, we contemplate what we ourselves are called to attain in the following of Christ the Lord and in obedience to his word, at the end of our earthly journey.

The last stage of the Mother of God's earthly pilgrimage invites us to look at the manner in which she journeyed on toward the goal of glorious eternity.

In the Gospel passage just proclaimed, St Luke tells that, after the Angel's announcement, Mary "arose and went with haste into the hill country", to visit Elizabeth (Lk 1: 39). With these words the Evangelist wishes to emphasize that for Mary to follow her own vocation in docility to God's Spirit, who has brought about within her the Incarnation of the Word, means taking a new road and immediately setting out from home, allowing herself to be led on a journey by God alone. St

Ambrose, commenting on Mary's "haste", says: "the grace of the Holy Spirit admits of no delay" (*Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam*, II, 19: PL 15, 1560). Our Lady's life is guided by Another: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1: 38); it is modelled by the Holy Spirit, it is marked by events and encounters, such as that with Elizabeth, but above all by her very special relationship with her Son Jesus. It is a journey on which Mary, cherishing and pondering in her heart the events of her own life, perceives in them ever more profoundly the mysterious design of God the Father for the salvation of the world.

Then, by following Jesus from Bethlehem to exile in Egypt, in both his hidden and his public life and even to the foot of the Cross, Mary lives her constant ascent to God in the spirit of the *Magnificat*, fully adhering to God's plan of love, even in moments of darkness and suffering, and nourishing in her heart total abandonment in the Lord's hands in order to be a paradigm for the faithful of the Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 64-65).

The whole of life is an ascent, the whole of life is meditation, obedience, trust and hope, even in darkness; and the whole of life is marked by this "holy haste" which knows that God always has priority and nothing else must create haste in our existence.

And, lastly, the Assumption reminds us that Mary's life, like that of every Christian, is a journey of following, following Jesus, a journey that has a very precise destination, a future already marked out: the definitive victory over sin and death and full communion with God, because as Paul says in his Letter to the Ephesians the Father "raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2: 6). This means that with Baptism we have already fundamentally been raised and are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, but we must physically attain what was previously begun and brought about in Baptism. In us, union with Christ resurrection is incomplete, but for the Virgin Mary it is complete, despite the journey that Our Lady also had to make. She has entered into the fullness of union with God, with her Son, she draws us onwards and accompanies us on our journey.

In Mary taken up into Heaven we therefore contemplate the One who, through a unique privilege, was granted to share with her soul and her body in Christ's definitive victory over death. "When her earthly life was over", the *Second Vatican Council* says, the Immaculate Virgin "was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory... and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords (cf. Rv 19: 16) and conqueror of sin and death" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 59). In the Virgin taken up into Heaven we contemplate the crowning of her faith, of that journey of faith which she points out to the Church and to each one of us: the One who, at every moment, welcomed the Word of God, is taken up into Heaven, in other words she herself is received by the Son in the "dwelling place" which he prepared for us with his death and Resurrection (cf. Jn 14: 2-3).

Human life on earth as the First Reading has reminded us is a journey that takes place,

constantly, in the intense struggle between the dragon and the woman, between good and evil. This is the plight of human history: it is like a voyage on a sea, often dark and stormy. Mary is the Star that guides us towards her Son Jesus, "the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history" (cf. *Spe Salvi*, n. 49) and gives us the hope we need: the hope that we can win, that God has won and that, with Baptism we entered into this victory. We do not succumb definitively: God helps us, he guides us.

This is our hope: this presence of the Lord within us that becomes visible in Mary taken up into Heaven. "The Virgin" in a little while we shall read in the Preface for this Solemnity "that you made to shine out as "a sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way".

With St Bernard, a mystic who sang the Blessed Virgin's praises, let us thus invoke her: "We pray you, O Blessed One, for the grace that you found, for those prerogatives that you deserved, for the Mercy you bore, obtain that the One who for your sake deigned to share in our wretchedness and infirmity, through your prayers may make us share in his graces, in his bliss and in his eternal glory, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who is above all things, Blessed God for ever and ever. Amen" (*Sermo 2 "de Adventu"*, 5: *PL* 183, 43).

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