

Feast of the Assumption

The Assumption of Mary was made part of the doctrine of our faith by Pius XII in 1950. Before then this feast had been kept by many of the faithful, especially in the eastern church. But then it became a feast for the entire church.

This feast might seem to some as a lucky strike extra, as something not really essential to our Christian faith, but the fact that Pius XII declared it to be part of the Church's essential beliefs means that that cannot be true. It is instead rooted in the bedrock of our faith. For this feast is nothing but a celebration of the feast of Easter now applied to Mary. At Easter we celebrate our belief that God the Father has raised Jesus his son from death and that Jesus now reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the glory of the divine life itself. At this feast of the Assumption we celebrate our belief that Mary is the first to share Jesus' risen life in its fullness.

In his Spiritual Exercises St. Ignatius tells the retreatant that the risen Jesus first appeared to his mother. There is no scriptural evidence for Ignatius' assertion. No Gospel speaks of such an appearance, but Ignatius believes that it would be unthinkable that Jesus would neglect his mother by not appearing to her before he

appeared to anyone else. That is, he believe, only fitting and just--- and human.

The Church is thinking the way Ignatius thought when she teaches us to believe in Mary's Assumption. Her argument would go something like this. Jesus is risen and promises all who believe in him and live according to his teachings a share in his eternal life. But Mary believed in him and lived according to his teachings more deeply than anyone else simply because she was his mother. For who knew him as well as she did? No one. And who was with him at the beginning and the end? She was. Therefore, she Mary must be the first to share his risen life.

There are two points which we might think about as we reflect on the Assumption of Mary. The first is that our Catholic faith is so human, for it applies to the relationship of Jesus and Mary that which we all experience in our own lives, and that is that the depth of our bonding with our mothers is unique and, though different, is as deep as the bond which unites husband and wife. Thus in proclaiming the Assumption as a reality of our faith the church is simply saying that it is only fitting and just that the mother of Jesus, the woman who gave birth to him and fed him with her

milk, should now share his new life with him in a way that no one else yet does—that is, completely.

Secondly, this feast reminds us all that we too, like Mary, are destined for resurrection, for new life. Having called us into existence, God will never abandon us to nothingness. And Jesus, God made human, made one of us, promises to share his new life with us, for he is our brother. We are part of his extended body. That thought must be part of our daily horizon. We are destined for life, and for life in its fullness. Even though we began, we will not end. The final enemy, death, will be overcome, and we shall be forever with the Lord Jesus in his new resurrected life, in his glory. Let us live each day in that hope.

the An Anglican scholar notes that his tradition does not share the belief in Mary's assumption because it would make her an exception to the rule and therefore go against the proper order which must be observed, an order described by Paul in our second reading for today and which claims that the resurrection will come at the end of time for all. For what we are saying when we celebrate this feast is that we believe that Mary, like her son, is already resurrected. For the Anglican scholar that is out of order. Mary, like everyone else, must wait her turn with everyone.

Personally, August 16, 2006 I believe that all those who have died are alive for God, whether positively or negatively, but their new existence is not yet complete because they still lack a resurrected body and the resurrected world in which it will exist. So what I have to believe, in accordance with this doctrine, is that Mary already has such a body. And I suppose we could say that it is not hard to believe that if we already believe that the Lord himself is fully resurrected. Why can he not share this state with his mother?

In any case, what we can all agree upon is that in celebrating this feast we profess our faith in our future resurrection or assumption. And if we really believe that, our lives here and now will be affected.