

# + Feast of the Assumption

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey  
pronounced on August 15, 2018

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Assumpta est Maria in caelum...Mary has been taken up into heaven: the Angels rejoice; in hymns of praise they bless the Lord. (First Antiphon of Lauds)*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,  
My very dear sons,

Sometimes we Christians are forced to stop and ponder, especially upon hearing more scandalous news concerning ecclesiastical matters, how the Church continues to exist at all and make its way amid the ups and downs, the persecutions and various tribulations of its history, including cruel deceptions such as the betrayal by some of its most eminent members. It is all a mystery as is commonly held. There are questions which will never fully be elucidated until the day of eternity. We can only try to understand. One factor to be considered here, however, is that the Church has wings.

In proper terms, we say that the Church has four attributes or marks, as listed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. She is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” These are her wings, as it were in metaphorical terms, the characteristics that allow the Church, as a Divine institution, the very Mystical Body of Christ, to exist and subsist and carry men along toward the Kingdom of Heaven—and this notwithstanding the powerful and even violent attempts of Satan to stop her progress here below.

In a similar way, analogously speaking, the Church is also Marian, that is to say, that the Blessed Virgin plays such an important role in the mystery of the Church that one might almost add this mark to the others. The Blessed Mother of God, especially in the mystery of her Assumption into Heaven, the feast we are celebrating today, is, like the Church, a winged creature, having spiritual pinions of marvelous lightness and strength to carry her and those devoted to her upward toward the Heavenly Jerusalem. Mary’s own grace as Mother of the one true God, the Savior of the world, clearly contributes something precious to our appreciation of the *oneness* of the Church; her Immaculate Conception bears witness to the *holiness* of the Church, which emulates her as its perfect exemplar; her maternal love extends to the ends of the earth as does the Church in its *catholicity* or universal character; finally, as Queen of the Apostles, the one who presided in some sense in the Upper Room with Christ’s disciples awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit, we find Our Lady intimately involved in the great matter of *apostolic* succession, even though there was never any question of her becoming a priest or of assuming a role that the Lord reserved for good reasons to men. Her own role was and is to uplift the successors of the Apostles and all the priests in the Church by the power of her contemplation.

Did the Blessed Virgin lift herself up on wings to Heaven after her holy death? Certainly not! Unlike her Son, who ascended into Heaven by the power of His divinity, Mary received the unique privilege of the Assumption in a purely passive manner. Some icons and pictures show her being lifted up by Holy Angels. In any case, it was not by means of wings of her own. From a different point of view, however, considering things from the perspective of Mary’s spiritual life and not in light of any power she might have held, we could say that the extreme ardor of her theological virtues bore her upward as on wings of prayer and love. Mary’s immense desire to be with her Son could not have been frustrated much longer, after the departure of the Lord at the Ascension. Her earthly existence then hung on a thread.

According to Saint Francis de Sales, all Saints die *in* God's love; some Saints die *because* of the love of God (as in the case of physical martyrdom, for example); more rarely, and this, he holds was the case of the Blessed Virgin, in some cases, Saints die *of* the love of God, when the intensity of their love causes the union between body and soul to be broken.

Love is strong as death, explains the Holy Doctor, since both equally separate the soul from the body and all terrestrial things, the only difference is, that the separation is real and effectual when caused by death, whereas that occasioned by love is usually confined to the heart. I say usually, because divine love is sometimes so violent that it actually separates the soul from the body, and, by causing the death of those who love, it renders them infinitely happier than if it bestowed on them a thousand lives. Many of the saints died, not only in the state of charity, but in the actual exercise of divine love. Saint Augustine expired in making an act of contrition, which cannot exist without love; Saint Jerome, in exhorting his disciples to charity and the practice of all virtues; Saint Ambrose, in conversing sweetly with his Savior, whom he had received in the Holy Eucharist; Saint Anthony of Padua also expired in the act of discoursing with our Divine Lord, after having recited a hymn in honor of the ever-glorious Virgin; Saint Thomas of Aquinas, with his hands clasped, his eyes raised to heaven, and pronouncing these words of the Canticle, which were the last he had expounded: "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field" (Canticle 7:2).<sup>1</sup>

As for the specific case of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the same Saint Francis de Sales provides this new insight:

It is said, on the one side, that Our Lady revealed to St. Mechtilde that the malady of which she died was no other thing than an impetuous assault of divine love; but St. Bridget and St. John Damascene testify that she died an extremely peaceful death; and both statements are true... For, as we see the lovely dawning of day grow, not at intervals and by shocks, but by a certain dilating and continuous brightening, which is almost insensibly perceptible...thus divine love grew at each moment in the virginal heart of our glorious Lady...without any agitation, or shock, or violence.<sup>2</sup>

So, what are we to do, here on this earth, a place so full of shock and agitation? Can we find the spiritual wings we need to keep our minds ever on high as it says in today's collect, *ad superna semper intenti*? Perhaps not without fail. But we must never underestimate the power of divine grace. If our possession of the theological virtue of charity (when we are in a state of grace) does not necessarily hold our souls above the turmoil of a world tormented by sin and error, the perfection of that virtue, acquired little by little, as the growing of the dawn, can in fact—easily enough, for it is God's power—preserve us from serious faults. As we imitate the Saints, especially the Queen of all the Saints, we can, despite appearances, distance ourselves little by little from the horrors that hem us in and try to lead us to eternal damnation. We can acquire wings in this sense. The Assumption is the unique privilege of the Immaculate Mother of God, but the death of love described by Saint Francis of Sales is not beyond what is a conceivable destiny for any Christian. Given the times in which we are living, an era when ecclesiastical policies and procedures—pastoral programs of every sort—seem not to have guaranteed the safety and welfare of the Christian people, it is surely time to return to the restoration of sanctity in every walk of life. The solution to the problem of corrupt clergy is not to have any clergy at all (the solution of the enemies of the Church), but to have again holy priests and bishops, something the simple faithful will obtain by their prayers and hidden sacrifices. Our Lady, Mother of the Church, lifted up to Heaven in body and soul, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia.

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Francis de Sales, *Treatise On the Love of God*, Book VII, Chapter IX.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter XIV.