

+Feast of the Assumption

August 15, 2019

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey

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,

On this day we celebrate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven. According to an authoritative teaching of the Church, though the matter has not been strictly defined, Mary did, in fact, at the end of her on earth, undergo death—and this in order better to imitate her Son—but it was a death so gentle and peaceful that it resembled very much a falling asleep, a “dormition” as the Greek Orthodox tradition calls it, though they seem to hold that she *only* fell asleep in this way and did not die. As astonishing as this may seem to skeptics, we Catholics also firmly hold that, after dying, Mary was restored to life, lifted up, body and soul reunited, into Heaven, there to dwell with Jesus, Who was already in that blessed place in his Risen Body, since the day he ascended following the Resurrection.

Well, we might ask: what does Our Lady *do* up in Heaven?

First of all, according to our Catholic Faith, she enjoys there the beatific vision. “Final and perfect happiness,” writes Saint Thomas Aquinas, “can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”¹ Even with long considerations on such a subject, it would impossible to do more than scratch the surface of a reality that exceeds our ability to comprehend. Nevertheless the Saints through their teaching give us a glimpse into the light. “The promise [of seeing God],” writes Saint Gregory of Nyssa, “surpasses all beatitude.... In Scripture, to see is to possess.... Whoever sees God has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive.”²

We must not be deceived here, however. Were the life of Heaven to consist entirely in an act of the glorified intellect, to the exclusion of the body and lower faculties of the soul, what good would the human body be? How could such an end account for the creation of man as a creature having both a soul and a body? It is certain that in Heaven, unlike our mortal existence on earth, the body will no longer be a source of pain or temptation. When our first parents sinned, the body ceased to be subordinate to the soul, the lower faculties of the soul ceased to be under the control of the higher faculties, and the entire human composite of body and soul ceased to have the correct subordination to God. All the woes of the human world flow from that primordial breakdown, that primeval catastrophe we call “original sin”. With Our Lady, who was never touched by this original sin, who is “younger than sin,” as Bernanos put it, things are different. But if she was never personally tainted by sin, she had nevertheless to live a mortal existence with the hardships experienced in a body doomed to die, under the shadow of the threat of the evil that eventually pierced her heart with sorrow when it put her innocent Son to death. Now, as she enters Heaven at the Assumption, that darkness is all past for Our Lady. To explain is a bit more, after the general resurrection, in the other blessed, as Saint Augustine explains, “from the happiness of the soul, the body and the bodily senses will receive a

¹ Summa Theologiae I-II, Q. 3, art 8, respondeo.

² *De beatitudinibus* 6: PG 44, 1265A.

certain overflow, so as to be perfected in their operations.”³ Now Our Lady already possesses her glorified body and so enjoys even now that participation of all the bodily senses in eternal beatitude.

So, united to God by means of the beatific vision in her soul, Mary also enjoys the overflowing of that fulfilling vision into her body and senses. But what does she *do* in Heaven? As we can gather by various indications, including from what we learn from the approved apparitions of the Blessed Virgin to various saints, she continues to intercede for us, who still walk upon the earth. Her Son, Jesus, the Christ, is the unique Mediator between God and man, but she too is Mediatrix on a subordinate level. Her maternal love embraces both those who pray to her, stumbling along the rugged road toward Heaven, and those who live far away from the light of truth, but who might still be saved. This is an ineffable mystery. How can the Blessed Virgin, while enjoying perfect beatitude, carry in her Heart solicitude for us mortal beings and our troubles? The answer lies in the fact that God Himself, though without the least trouble to His Divine Majesty, ever has a paternal love that looks after His creatures. Mary is plunged in the ocean of the love of God, but that love is act. This has to do with the revelation of what Divine Love is, something both at peace and yet active.

Finally, after the course of her earthly existence, endowed forever with the very vision of God and all the attending goods in body and soul, Our Lady no longer has to *become* anything. We humans on earth continue to learn and to experience new things. Thus we acquire, we expand in a certain manner the frontiers of our being, not as changing our species or substance, but by virtue of our capacity to gain wisdom and virtue. We become more in this sense. But Our Lady, as with all the blessed, has not longer to become anything else, to become more. In Heaven she can, at last, perfectly enjoy the beatific vision, and this unique woman, full of grace on earth, is now full of what our theologians call *lumen gloriae*, the infinite light of glory. At last she can simply know and love; at last she can simply *be*. So be it.

Our Lady in the mystery of her Assumption is the patron saint of Fontgombault Abbey in France, the monastery that founded Clear Creek in 1999. Twenty years ago today many preparations were being made at the ancient French abbey situated on the *Creuse* river, in view of the impending departure for America to take place a few weeks later. That feast of the Assumption would be the last we would celebrate at Fontgombault, but we brought with us to Oklahoma a great devotion for the ancient Marian feast, so full of the beauty and charm proper to the Mother of God. Although Marian devotion is a legacy everywhere present in the Church, we see a very special kind attached to Notre-Dame de Fontgombault, one that we wish to keep here as well. May Our Lady of the Assumption, Our Lady of the Annunciation, ever be our true Mother in Heaven. Amen. Alleluia.

³ Ep. ad Dioscor.