

# +Feast of the Assumption

Homily pronounced on August 15, 2020  
Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey

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

*Pulchra es et decora...Thou art beautiful and comely, daughter of Jerusalem, terrible as an army in battle array.<sup>1</sup>*

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

Later this year, on the eighth day of December we will celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which celebrates the mysterious initial stage, the starting point of that incomparable beauty we find in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Today, on the feast of the Assumption, we contemplate that same beauty lifted up to Heaven, consummated, Mary's loveliness at its zenith. But why is this important?

"Beauty will save the world." This shining phrase, cast like a gem into the rather muddy pond of a novel by an early modern Russian author,<sup>2</sup> has caught the attention of many a Catholic thinker over the past few decades. The idea is that, in a time inundated by rhetoric stemming from the most contradictory of ideas, in an epoch where arguments have somewhat lost their power to persuade the masses, the spectacle of true beauty still moves minds and hearts and can thus prove effective in guiding a staggering humanity that has lost its way toward nobler aspirations. "Beauty will save the world." It is possible that the phrase has been over-used. But the real question is whether it is really true, whether beauty will save us in some real manner, that is whether God, through the intermediary of beauty, will bring salvation to our generation and to the next, as wounded humanity continues its quest for its true and final destiny. And time is getting short. We have come to the point of history when Dostoevsky's poetic inspiration will no doubt be tested against hard facts.

It is clear enough that a kind of revolution is already on our doorstep, especially in America and in Europe. Churches are burning and holy images are being desecrated. Of course, as in all revolutions, things are not always black and white. There are peaceful protesters who are enraged about real injustices. But that is not the revolution of which I am speaking. The latter follows a certain pattern of mob violence and radical betrayal of all that is wholesome, bringing a darkness that has no kinship with the light. At heart this radical revolution is the apotheosis of ugliness, a dramatic privation of the harmonious proportion of things that makes for beauty. It is the reign of darkness, the false majesty of the ugly. Will beauty save us from this abyss?

On this feast of the Assumption, we are not speculating in the abstract. We have before us, already, a concrete answer, a beauty that is not merely an ideal, but which has already crossed through the woof and warp of our Christian civilization: it is a person. In his *Diary of a Country Priest*, George Bernanos offers words that were about the Immaculate Conception of Mary, but which also tell us something about the beauty of Our Lady of the Assumption:

The eyes of Our Lady are the only real child-eyes that have ever been raised to our shame and sorrow. ... they are not indulgent — for there is no indulgence without something of bitter experience — they are eyes of gentle pity, wondering sadness, and with something more in

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<sup>1</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Antiphon of Laudes. Song of Songs 6:4.

<sup>2</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 1874.

them, never yet known or expressed, something that makes her younger than sin, younger than the race from which she sprang, and though a mother, by grace, Mother of all graces, our little youngest sister.

Mary's is a beauty that, in the eternal designs of God, pre-dates sin, and therefore escapes the very taint of sin, sin being the source, really, of all that is contrary to beauty.

But there is more. As we read today in the Divine Office this text taken from the Cantic of Canticles referring to Our Lady, *Thou art beautiful and comely, daughter of Jerusalem, terrible as an army in battle array.*<sup>3</sup> She has child-like, innocent eyes, yes, but their very innocence causes the demons and the forces of evil to flee, as if before a great army. Just as the beauty of Judith, set to the task of overpowering a wicked general, saved her people from imminent destruction; just as the beauty of Esther won the heart of the great king and rescued the entire race of the Hebrews from a decree of extermination; the beauty of the Blessed Virgin is not an idle thing. It is not the kind of vain beauty that leads men astray. "Favor is deceitful," says the Book of Proverbs, "and beauty is vain: the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."<sup>4</sup> Mary is the one who has in the highest degree the beautiful fear of God that remains in eternity. And her beauty on earth, better than that of Esther or Judith, can move whole nations. Though utterly feminine, it is a true and strong beauty.

So it is that the faithful in past times have turned to the beauty of the Blessed Virgin in moments of distress, as to a source, not only of consolation, but of strength. It was the power of Our Lady's Rosary, that, according to Pope Saint Pius V, won the great victorious battle of Lepanto. It was his Marian devotion that led the Polish King John Sobieski to victory over the immense Turkish forces at the battle of Vienna on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1683, date that would become the feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary. So may it be in our present age of cultural upheaval and spiritual darkness.

If through delight in the beauty [of the luminaries of heaven] men assumed them to be gods, explains the Book of Wisdom, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them...For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, Mary's beauty is just a very pure and perfect reflection of a higher beauty.

With tender devotion and immense hope, we look to Our Lady in her glorious Assumption for that perception of the Creator and help in our present needs for the Church and the world. May she assist us in our present needs and lead us to the ultimate beauty that is God Himself. Amen. Alleluia.

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<sup>3</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Antiphon of Laudes. Song of Songs 6:4.

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs, 31:30

<sup>5</sup> Wisdom 13:3-5.