

+Feast of the Assumption

Homily pronounced on August 15, 2022,
By the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson,
Abbot Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey

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

Signum magnum apparuit in caelo, A great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (Revelations 12:1)

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

Never was there mere creature—be it Cherub or prominent member of the choir of Seraphim—more gracious than the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her beauty transcends the canons of art, surpasses the greatest exemplars of human loveliness known to history. The Church contemplates this truth on today’s feast of the Assumption, as we commemorate that sublime moment, when, being lifted body and soul into the glory of Heaven, Mary’s beauty found its ultimate consummation. Today’s Introit, taken from the Book of the Apocalypse, powerfully underlines the mystery. She is wrapped in the Divine sunshine of grace, receiving a crown of twelve stars upon her head like a divine diadem. Nothing mars the picture—or almost nothing: nothing except that shadow down upon earth, while time continues to unfold, the shadow of an adversary.

Today’s first reading, taken from the book of Judith alludes to this enmity. Judith, a figure of Blessed Virgin, was in her own day a woman of exceptional beauty and of noble character, who faced a terrible crisis, one that might have led to the ruin of her people. She was forced to take up the sword, acting for a moment like a man, because the people were in grave danger. A victory had to be gained over powerful enemies, and she alone could accomplish it. “Blessed be the Lord, who made heaven and earth,” said the town leaders after the danger had passed, “who hath directed thee to the cutting off the head of the prince of our enemies” (Judith 13:24). Judith did, indeed, behead, with a stroke of his own sword, the great captain, Holofernes, the one who had come to destroy the people of God, but who was instead conquered by this woman. In fact, Holofernes is really just an image of a worse enemy, lurking behind the scenes of the world.

Far greater, indeed, was the task assigned to the Blessed Virgin, the true Judith: that of defeating the devil himself. But this takes some understanding. It all goes back to the beginning of the world. After Adam and Eve had sinned, bringing about the fall of the human race, God, having pity on poor mankind, promised a solution. “I will put enmities,” He said to the serpent, “between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head”—the better text may well be ‘it’, i.e. the seed of the woman, will crush thy head, but it comes down to the same meaning—“and thou shall lie in wait for her heel” (Gen. 3:15).

It was by fulfilling her essential vocation of Mother of God, that the Blessed Virgin of Nazareth brought to ruin the ancient enemy. By bringing into the world the God-Man, the Second Person of the Trinity Incarnate, by serving as an instrument of choice in the execution of God’s loving designs for the world and its salvation, she effectively crushed the head of Satan, because Christ, her true offspring, was the one who had the power to destroy the prince of this

world and did so. This reminds us of the Marian interpretation of the great vision of the Book of the Apocalypse, where we contemplate the woman clothed with the sun and the great red dragon that pursues the woman and her son, but who is frustrated in his attempt to destroy them both.

Some in the past have compared, with great sagacity, Communist Russia to that red dragon of the Apocalypse. The comparison says it all. The Soviet version of the Marxist ideal, like a monster of vast proportions, spread its poison with deadly efficaciousness during much of the twentieth century. Its flag was blood red. Many feared it would come to enslave the entire earth. Some even called this political darkness the “mystical body of Satan.” Those who lived under the slavery of Communist society, void of God and of human kindness, know all too well the wiles of the great dragon. Some say that now that red dragon is just sleeping. In any case it has ceased for the moment to conquer new territories, at least under the form previously known.

In our own day, however, a similar error is hard at work in the world, even while the great Soviet Communist Empire has lost most of its “feathers” and all but a vestige of its former prestige. We increasingly see a softer, more insidious form of the error—a new variety of materialism, a second-cousin of Marxism—strangling the Western world, one perhaps even more dangerous than the tanks and missiles of the Red Army. Sadly, it is our America, rather than Russia, that is the preferred terrain for the new serpent. Where the red dragon failed in its bid to dominate the entire world, a “pink dragon,” as it were, seems to have taken up the struggle, promoting a multitude of errors that undermine families, cities, and nations. This flag might be pink or, perhaps better, the colors of the rainbow. As usual the Church, together with all men of good will and Our Lady—always leading the way—remains the only institution capable of resisting this evil head on.

Furthermore, in these days of August 2022 we face a sobering situation. It is easy enough to discern, right here in America, the dawn of a new era of persecutions, perhaps of a subtler nature than in the time of Nero, but no less deadly. Already, despite the recent victory at the Supreme Court, it is becoming increasingly dangerous to voice certain legitimate opinions in our land, or to affirm fundamental principles of Divine and Natural Law that were most dear to the founders of our nation. Soon it may be against the law to say the stones are hard and water is wet. The abortion battle is not over, nor is the battle for the souls of our children.

So, what is to be done? The same as before; the same as always. The snowy-white, Immaculate foot of the Blessed Virgin of Nazareth, Mother of God, is the proper weapon that will crush the new snake-heads too. The Immaculate Heart is the banner to rally around in this new battle, or this new phase of the same battle. The new Judith, Our Lady, will slay this monster too. Perhaps the time of the Antichrist is at hand, that of the “man of iniquity.” Like Holofernes, he too will be slain with his own sword, at the hand of woman.

In the end it is all about preparing for the Kingdom of the Messiah that will be the beautiful consummation of the world as we know it, the end to which all our lives tend. Someday, by the grace of God, we too hope to be taken up to Heaven, to have our very bodies transformed and joined to our souls for a life that will know no shadows. For the moment, however, we are, whether we know it or not, in the thick of battle. This is good too. This way we can, as Saint Paul says, “fill up in the flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for His body, which is the Church” (Colossians 1:24). So, let us put on our spiritual armor and move toward the light. As Saint Joan of Arc famously said, “In God’s name the soldiers will fight, and God will give the victory.” Amen. Alleluia.