

+Feast of the Assumption

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
August 15, 2023

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. (Revelation 12:1)

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

Often has Saint John's vision of the woman clothed with the sun with the moon under her feet been understood as a prophecy describing historical events surrounding a given generation of believers. Such was surely the case with the early Christians, who expected the end of the world to be very near. More generally, in this prophetic image we contemplate both the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Church herself as she endures the hardships of her earthly pilgrimage and the great war that is waged between God and the devil, between the holy angels and the fallen ones, between the spiritual light and the spiritual darkness. It is a page to which we return again and again, and this is especially fitting on the feast of the Assumption into Heaven of Our Lady, the all-luminous Mother of God and Queen of Heaven.

Perhaps our present situation in America suggests a secondary but not un-worthy interpretation of this vision: we might see, it seems, in this celestial woman a revelation of God's plan for the *family*—not merely the family as a natural institution, but the family as willed by God under the grace of the New and Everlasting Covenant. At this moment, I am thinking especially of the decision of the United States Supreme Court some years ago, practically redefining marriage (against all reason and all justice). It is clearly urgent to meditate upon the family, and a precious light will perhaps be shed on this institution through the prophetic vision of the Apocalypse that it used by the Church in today's feast.

In fact, following this vision recorded at the beginning of chapter twelve of the Apocalypse—the one that reminds us so much of Mary's glorious Assumption into Heaven—details are added that correspond to the harshness of our mortal life here below. This woman cries in the travail of childbirth; she is in pain. The evil red dragon lies in wait, hoping to devour her son. After she is delivered of her child, "who is taken up to God and to his throne," she must flee "into the wilderness," as the sacred text tells us, where this evil beast makes war "with the rest of her seed" (Apoc. 12:17). Is this not an image of the Church in our time? For us too, Christ, the Son of Mary, has ascended to the throne of His Father, but here below the Evil One persecutes the Church, who must hide in a kind of cultural wilderness, as the battle continues between Saint Michael and the Dragon. But things get even worse.

The Dragon, or the "Serpent" as the text also calls him, cannot simply leave the woman, the Church, alone. He feels such hatred that he is compelled to pursue her. From his mouth come the waters of a deadly persecution, one so bad that, as the text tells us, the woman risks being carried away to ruin by it, as by a fierce river at flood stage. Fortunately and quite mysteriously, the earth helps the woman, opening up its mouth to swallow up the evil river.

So is it now with the family. Not only has the true teaching of the Church on the family been progressively banished from the public square (and even from some formerly Catholic churches and schools), and replaced with an absurd, counterfeit conception of human life and marriage, but a growing number of the people who are at the control switches of civil society are attempting to eliminate the very idea of marriage as something natural and supernatural—something God-given. Those who, in indignation, oppose this unholy revolution, that is to say in particular Catholic Christians, appear as misguided fools unable to keep up with the evolution of the human experience. It is truly a case of mass delusion, perhaps as never before seen, at least on such a scale.

The deadly river vomited forth from the dragon's mouth is, I think, that ocean of impurity that now covers so much of the world, especially our own land. How this harms families! Everything is tainted by it, and souls grow used to this sick environment. Perhaps the earth, that is to say creation in its true nature, will, indeed, "swallow up" this most harmful water of uncleanness, as in the vision of the Apocalypse, although we do not yet know how. Perhaps the idea of help coming from the earth is an indication that we need to keep our feet on the ground and in contact with reality ("back to earth, back to the land"), shunning excessive use of modern technology, so we can keep from being carried away by the unholy tide.

Those endowed with keen foresight saw all of this coming for some time. Already in 1981, just to give one small example, Saint John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (n. 6), wrote the following:

Signs are not lacking of a disturbing degradation of some fundamental values: a mistaken theoretical and practical concept of the independence of the spouses in relation to each other; serious misconceptions regarding the relationship of authority between parents and children; the concrete difficulties that the family itself experiences in the transmission of values; the growing number of divorces; the scourge of abortion; the ever more frequent recourse to sterilization; the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality.

At the root of these negative phenomena there frequently lies a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being.

It must be added that the Church has immense compassion for the weaknesses of human beings. A clear and unambiguous affirmation of the true nature of the family does not imply the condemnation or rejection of those who experience serious difficulties in living up to the teachings of the Church. But in the end there is nothing more precious than the truth. It will be of help to no one to blur the lines, to obscure the truth, to allow for ambiguity in the essential principles of human life. Sometimes, while respecting persons, a hard line of principle has nevertheless to be drawn in the sand.

How did we ever get to this point? Where does this madness that would tear apart the family and society as a whole come from? Each one of us must ask this question in prayer.

Human nature and the meaning of marriage are realities known to all of us by the simple fact that each one of being a man or a woman. It is really not that difficult: only sin makes it so. Marriage in this world is not a paradise, but rather a school of life. It requires that human beings carry their Cross and give their best. But it is a wonderful path that *does* lead to Paradise. May Our Lady of the Assumption,

the Lady clothed in the sun, the Mother of God and of the Church, powerfully lend us some of her light at this dark hour. Enlisted in her army we cannot fail; the family will emerge victorious. Amen.
Alleluia.