

MARIA ASSUMPTA EST

Last November, on our diocesan pilgrimage to the Holy Land, one of the holy places in Jerusalem we visited was Dormition Abbey. The word *Dormition* means *going to sleep* and in the crypt is a famous sculpture of the BVM asleep. This is the place where at the end of Her life and work, Mary is said to have fallen asleep in death. Her death was serene, like falling asleep and waking up in the arms of Christ in heaven. The Dormition is what Eastern Christians call today's feast. We however call it the Assumption. We stress not Mary's dying but her rising. According to St. Gregory of Tours, when the apostles visited Her tomb, it was empty. She had gone. Her body, transformed, had been carried off to heaven. It was not there, which is why no shrine on earth has ever claimed to possess it. The Western tradition directs our thoughts to the risen body and the new creation to which we are all called. Of course both traditions, East and West, are really two sides of the same coin.

So what does today's feast mean for us? Three thoughts. First, this midsummer feast makes us think of heaven, for in Mary we see the effects of Christ's resurrection. As St. Paul said in 2ndR: *Just as all die in Adam, so all will be brought to life in Christ, but all in their proper order.* Heaven is a new creation, real, physical, bodily though transformed. We should long for heaven. Our life here is passing away. This world is a preparation for the next. The good we do, the sufferings we endure, the love we shew, all in Christ have eternal value. So today, let us re-set our sights on the life of the world to come. Let us reject evil and choose good. Let us long to be with God, to be with the saints and angels, to be with our departed loved ones.

But secondly, it's significant that the first fully redeemed human is a woman. As St. Elizabeth said in the Gospel: *of all women you are the most blessed*. Christ is the New Adam, but St. Ambrose calls Mary the New Eve. The *Catechism* discusses the theological meaning of this, of being male and being female. It warns against ideologies that enslave and do not liberate: those who regard men and women as identical and those who regard women and men as totally different. The Gospel however sees men and women as equal yet complimentary. In Genesis man and woman together were created in the image of God for life and for love: to populate the earth and to find happiness in each other. Today's feast then has much to say on sexuality to today's gender war.

And thirdly, the assumption of Mary, flesh and spirit, reminds us of the sacred value of the body as well as the soul. For God the Son took to Himself through Mary a human body, and it's through the stuff of this earth, the sacraments, He shares with us the gifts of eternal life. Hence the old adage: all salvation comes to us through the humanity of Christ. This is why Catholics are true greens. Humans should respect creation, live responsibly and use wisely the world's resources. Pope Francis explores this Christian ecology in his Letter *Laudato Si* about which in the autumn we'll be having a major diocesan conference.

*A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman adorned with the sun with twelve stars on her head for a crown.* That woman is Mary, the first redeemed human, a model for us, our hope. No wonder She is the best-loved member of the Church, indeed, our Mother. Today, as we sing Her *Magnificat*, let's ask Her prayers for the spread of the Faith.