

MARIA ASSUMPTA: THE CULTURE OF LIFE

Today, we thank God for 150 years of this beautiful parish and church dedicated to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. We thank God for all we've received over the years in this holy house: the baptisms and First HCs, the marriages and funerals, the parish priests and parishioners we've known and loved. Anniversaries are occasions for looking back. We thank God for the generosity of Charles John Eyston, who founded this church consecrated in 1865. We remember too the Centenary Mass in 1965 concelebrated by Mgr. Mullarkey and Fr. Raymond Lawrence, and then the rededication by Bishop Emery in 1983. But now 2015, under the excellent pastoral care of Mgr. Andrew Burnham and after many recent improvements, we offer this Mass in thanksgiving to God for all the clergy and people, past and present, for the Eyston family and for you, the many generous benefactors who enable this parish's mission.

It is a great joy to celebrate *today* on this glorious Feastday of Mary's Assumption. We love Mary because, as the Mother of Jesus, she always brings us to Him; moreover, from the Cross Jesus gave us Mary to be our own loving Mother too. Today, the Assumption, we profess that at the end of her natural life, she was taken up into heaven. According to St. Gregory of Tours, the Apostles visited her tomb on the third day but found it empty. She had gone. She had risen, which is why no church on earth, unlike with any other saint, has ever claimed to possess her body. Interestingly, the Eastern Churches call this feast the Dormition, Mary's going-to-sleep, underlining how her holy life was complemented by a holy death in which she fell asleep and awoke in the arms of Christ her Son. Our Western tradition underlines her bodily resurrection, that as Mother of the Church and the First Disciple, Mary is now in heaven in body *aswellas* soul, the pattern of what we too are one day called to be. Both traditions are two sides of the same coin. They give us real hope and joy. They make us in midsummer raise our eyes to heaven, to the new creation, to Jesus, and to that TGLHHAF for which our hearts long.

But anniversaries are also times to look forward and in view of the next 150 years, the mission of this parish couldn't be more urgent. For in our society, millions of people, even some of our own loved ones, are now spiritually adrift, with no knowledge of God, without the love of Jesus Christ, bereft of the Gospel. Consequently contemporary culture, awash on a tide of moral relativism, condones killing the unborn child and now toys with suicide for the sick, weak and elderly, with a brave new world of euthanasia and eugenics in the offing. As Catholics, we need to protest and to stem this tide. For we believe in the natural way of life from conception to death. We believe in respect for the dignity of the human person, body and soul. We believe that the way of life Christ has shown us is not only the Truth but the right Way, the human Way, the sure Way to happiness, and this Good News we need to communicate convincingly and attractively. Indeed, this is exactly the work of new evangelisation the Church in our time is calling us to.

So in this happy anniversary Mass today, as we look back to thank God and as we look forward to ask His blessing on the mission ahead, let's call on the prayers of Mary our Mother, Queen assumed into heaven. We pray for this parish, for our Diocese and for the Church in our land that we may have the grace to live authentically the Gospel we profess and the courage and creativity to proclaim it to everyone around us.