

HOMILY SUNDAY 20 – C (Homily 01)

“The Assumption of Mary”

Rev 11:19, 12:1-6, 10; Ps 45; 1 Cor 15:20-26; Lk 1:39-56)

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An evangelical student at a high school once approached a Catholic chaplain to question him about Mary, “Why do you Catholics worship Mary when it says in the bible that Jesus pushed her away when she wanted to see him?”

The chaplain gently and patiently responded by pointing out that she did not understand the scriptures. Jesus was not pushing Mary away in his response. Not at all – in fact, he was doing just the opposite. Jesus used Mary as a model for us in his teaching. Mary was his mother physically, having given birth to him. We can’t get closer to anyone than that. But Jesus pointed out that those who read his Word, keep it and pray with it can be closer to him spiritually than he is to his own mother physically.

This feast of the Assumption of Mary holds insights into the role of Mary and invites us to emulate Mary, to live in faith, hope, love, humility and joy.

What St. John saw in his remarkable vision in the first reading from the Book of Revelations is part of the answer to the student’s question. We are told that God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. Immediately after that statement, John shares his vision of Mary first about to give birth to a son, then having given birth, cared for by God in a place prepared for her.

What this vision is saying is that Mary is the ark of the new covenant. As the old ark carried the Word of God written on paper in the desert, so Mary carried in her womb the Word of God made flesh in our humanity. Mary appearing as part of John’s vision tells us that she is there, with God, in God’s temple, in heaven. She has gone before us and is enjoying even now the salvation, the power, the kingdom of our God and the authority of Christ, her Son.

This feast of the Assumption of Mary flows out of a history of both the lived and written tradition in the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the early apostles were able to meet and say, “We and the Holy Spirit decided” before there were any New Testament scriptures at all. In that light, the lived tradition from the earliest days of the Church holds that Mary was

assumed into heaven, much as the great prophet Elijah was assumed into heaven in a chariot of fire. It began as a feast in the Eastern Church after the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD which proclaimed Mary the Mother of God. A century later it marked the death or Dormition of Mary. The Western church started to celebrate this feast around 650 AD. This feast basically means there was no obstacle to deny her passing through death to become the first, after Jesus her Son, to be raised body and soul to the fullness of life with God.

The Gospel story of the visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth adds the nuances of love, joy and humility to this feast. Joy is the three letter word that is the hallmark of the kingdom of God. Elizabeth was filled with joy when Mary visited her. Her child, John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, leaped with joy in his mother's womb.

This Gospel shows the power of God at work in a surprising way. The renowned Rembrandt has painted this scene depicting two very ordinary women hidden in the Judean countryside, a visit to a cousin, nothing visibly extra-ordinary, yet very special. These two women who were totally unknown to the elite of that time would influence the history of the world as no others could.

Mary's Magnificat extols the way that God works wonders in quiet ways. God casts down the proud and works in the humble; the poor; the lowly, in those who know they need help. The Magnificat is filled with a sense of social justice which is a core element of the kingdom of God.

The second reading from 1 Corinthians adds that those who believe, who belong to Christ, will experience the power of God at work in their lives as new life, as resurrection. The power of God manifests itself especially as forgiveness and healing of our sinfulness.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta stands out as an example of discipleship that is modeled after Mary. She came from a faithful, prayerful family. Like Mary, hers was a humble faith that found Jesus in the ordinary events of everyday life. Her Eucharistic faith, her love of contemplative prayer, and her compassion and caring for the poorest of the poor, gives witness to the name she gave her order, the Missionaries of Charity, a title that could also be given to Mary.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a great act of faith; a humble meal that gives us hope; that makes present God's love in Christ, and is to be celebrated with joy.

So let us strive to emulate Mary and live in faith, hope, love, humility and joy.