



The Holy See

MASS ON THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Parish Church of St Thomas of Villanova, Castel Gandolfo
Tuesday, 15 August 2006*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

In the *Magnificat*, the great hymn of Our Lady that we have just heard in the Gospel, we find some surprising words. Mary says: "Henceforth all generations will call me blessed". The Mother of the Lord prophesies the Marian praises of the Church for all of the future, the Marian devotion of the People of God until the end of time. In praising Mary, the Church did not invent something "adjacent" to Scripture: she responded to this prophecy which Mary made at that moment of grace.

And Mary's words were not only personal, perhaps arbitrary words. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit as St Luke said, exclaimed with a loud cry: "Blessed is she who believed...". And Mary, also filled with the Holy Spirit, continues and completes what Elizabeth said, affirming: "all generations will call me blessed". It is a real prophesy, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in venerating Mary, the Church responds to a command of the Holy Spirit; she does what she has to do.

We do not praise God sufficiently by keeping silent about his saints, especially Mary, "the Holy One" who became his dwelling place on earth. The simple and multiform light of God appears to us exactly in its variety and richness only in the countenance of the saints, who are the true mirrors of his light. And it is precisely by looking at Mary's face that we can see more clearly than in any other way the beauty, goodness and mercy of God. In her face we can truly perceive the divine light.

"All generations will call me blessed". We can praise Mary, we can venerate Mary for she is "blessed", she is blessed for ever. And this is the subject of this Feast. She is blessed because she is united to God, she lives with God and in God.

On the eve of his Passion, taking leave of his disciples, the Lord said: "In my Father's house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you".

By saying, "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word", Mary prepared God's dwelling here on earth; with her body and soul, she became his dwelling place and thereby opened the earth to heaven.

In the Gospel we have just heard, St Luke, with various allusions, makes us understand that Mary is the true Ark of the Covenant, that the mystery of the Temple - God's dwelling place here on earth - is fulfilled in Mary. God, who became present here on earth, truly dwells in Mary. Mary becomes his tent. What all the cultures desire - that God dwell among us - is brought about here.

St Augustine says: "Before conceiving the Lord in her body she had already conceived him in her soul". She had made room for the Lord in her soul and thus really became the true Temple where God made himself incarnate, where he became present on this earth.

Thus, being God's dwelling place on earth, in her the eternal dwelling place has already been prepared, it has already been prepared for ever. And this constitutes the whole content of the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary, body and soul, into heavenly glory, expressed here in these words. Mary is "blessed" because - totally, in body and soul and for ever - she became the Lord's dwelling place. If this is true, Mary does not merely invite our admiration and veneration, but she guides us, shows us the way of life, shows us how we can become blessed, how to find the path of happiness.

Let us listen once again to Elizabeth's words fulfilled in Mary's *Magnificat*: "Blessed is she who believed". The first and fundamental act in order to become a dwelling place of God and thus find definitive happiness is to believe: it is faith, faith in God, in that God who showed himself in Jesus Christ and makes himself heard in the divine Word of Holy Scripture.

Believing is not adding one opinion to others. And the conviction, the belief, that God exists is not information like any other. Regarding most information, it makes no difference to us whether it is true or false; it does not change our lives. But if God does not exist, life is empty, the future is empty. And if God exists, everything changes, life is light, our future is light and we have guidance for how to live. Therefore, believing constitutes the fundamental orientation of our life. To believe, to say: "Yes, I believe that you are God, I believe that you are present among us in the Incarnate Son", gives my life a direction, impels me to be attached to God, to unite with God and so to find my dwelling place, and the way to live.

To believe is not only a way of thinking or an idea; as has already been mentioned, it is a way of acting, a manner of living. To believe means to follow the trail indicated to us by the Word of God. In addition to this fundamental act of faith, which is an existential act, a position taken for the whole of life, Mary adds another word: "His mercy is on those who fear him".

Together with the whole of Scripture, she is speaking of "fear of God". Perhaps this is a phrase with which we are not very familiar or do not like very much. But "fear of God" is not anguish; it is something quite different. As children, we are not anxious about the Father but we have fear of God, the concern not to destroy the love on which our life is based.

Fear of God is that sense of responsibility that we are bound to possess, responsibility for the portion of the world that has been entrusted to us in our lives. It is responsibility for the good administration of this portion of the world and of history, and one thus helps the just building of the world, contributing to the victory of goodness and peace.

"All generations will call you blessed": this means that the future, what is to come, belongs to God, it is in God's hands, that it is God who conquers.

Nor does he conquer the mighty dragon of which today's First Reading speaks, the dragon that represents all the powers of violence in the world. They seem invincible but Mary tells us that they are not invincible.

The Woman - as the First Reading and the Gospel show us - is stronger, because God is stronger. Of course, in comparison with the dragon, so heavily armed, this Woman who is Mary, who is the Church, seems vulnerable or defenceless. And truly God is vulnerable in the world, because he is Love and love is vulnerable. Yet he holds the future in his hands: it is love, not hatred, that triumphs; it is peace that is victorious in the end.

This is the great consolation contained in the Dogma of Mary's Assumption body and soul into heavenly glory. Let us thank the Lord for this consolation but let us also see it as a commitment for us to take the side of good and peace. And let us pray to Mary, Queen of Peace, to help peace to be victorious today: "Queen of Peace, pray for us!". Amen!