



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Thomas of Villanova Parish, Castel Gandolfo
Sunday, 15 August 2010

(Video)

Images of the celebration

*Your Eminence, Your Excellency, Distinguished Authorities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Today the Church is celebrating one of the most important feasts of the Liturgical Year dedicated to Mary Most Holy: the Assumption. At the end of her earthly life Mary was taken up, body and soul, into Heaven, that is, into the glory of eternal life, into full and perfect communion with God.

It is 60 years since Venerable Pope Pius XII, on 1 November 1950, solemnly defined this Dogma and although it is somewhat complicated I would like to read the formula of dogmatization. The Pope says: "Hence the revered Mother of God, from all eternity joined in a hidden way with Jesus Christ in one and the same decree of predestination, immaculate in her conception, a most perfect virgin in her divine motherhood, the noble associate of the divine Redeemer who has won a complete triumph over sin and its consequences, finally obtained, as the supreme culmination of her privileges, that she should be preserved free from the corruption of the tomb and that, like her own Son, having overcome death, she might be taken up body and soul to the glory of Heaven where, as Queen, she sits in splendour at the right hand of her Son, the *immortal* King of the Ages" (Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, n. 40, 1950).

This then is the nucleus of our faith in the Assumption: we believe that Mary, like Christ her Son,

overcame death and is already triumphant in heavenly glory, in the totality of her being, "in body and soul".

In today's Second Reading St Paul helps us to shed a little more light on this mystery starting from the central event of human history and of our faith: that is, the event of Christ's Resurrection which is "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep". Immersed in his Paschal Mystery, we are enabled to share in his victory over sin and death. Here lies the startling secret and key reality of the whole human saga. St Paul tells us that we are "incorporated" Adam, the first man and the old man, that we all possess the same human heritage to which belong suffering, death and sin. But every day adds something new to this reality that we can all see and live: not only are we part of this heritage of the one human being that began with Adam but we are also "incorporated" in the new man, in the Risen Christ, and thus the life of the Resurrection is already present in us. Therefore this first biological "incorporation" is incorporation into death, it is an incorporation that generates death. The second, new "incorporation", that is given to us in Baptism is an "incorporation" that gives life. Again, I cite today's Second Reading: St Paul says: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor 15: 21-24).

Now, what St Paul says of all human beings the Church in her infallible Magisterium says of Mary in a precise and clear manner: the Mother of God is so deeply integrated into Christ's Mystery that at the end of her earthly life she already participates with her whole self in her Son's Resurrection. She lives what we await at the end of time when the "last enemy" death will have been destroyed (cf. 1 Cor 15: 26); she already lives what we proclaim in the Creed: "We look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come".

We can then ask ourselves: what are the roots of this victory over death wonderfully anticipated in Mary? Its roots are in the faith of the Virgin of Nazareth, as the Gospel passage we have heard testifies (Lk 1: 39-56): a faith that is obedience to the word of God and total abandonment to the divine action and initiative, in accordance with what the Archangel announced to her. Faith, therefore, is Mary's greatness, as Elizabeth joyfully proclaims: Mary is "blessed among women" and "blessed is the fruit of [her] womb", for she is Mother of the Lord" because she believed and lived uniquely the "first" of the Beatitudes, the Beatitude of faith. Elizabeth confesses it in her joy and in that of her child who leaps in her womb: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (v. 45). Dear friends, let us not limit ourselves to admiring Mary in her destiny of glory, as a person very remote from us. No! We are called to look at all that the Lord, in his love, wanted to do for us too, for our final destiny: to live through faith in a perfect communion of love with him and hence to live truly.

In this regard I would like to reflect on an aspect of the affirmation of the dogma where assumption into heavenly glory is mentioned. All of us today are well aware that by the term "Heaven" we are

not referring to somewhere in the universe, to a star or such like; no. We mean something far greater and far more difficult to define with our limited human conceptions. With this term "Heaven" we wish to say that God, the God who made himself close to us, does not abandon us in or after death but keeps a place for us and gives us eternity. We mean that in God there is room for us. To understand this reality a little better let us look at our own lives. We all experience that when people die they continue to exist, in a certain way, in the memory and heart of those who knew and loved them. We might say that a part of the person lives on in them but it resembles a "shadow" because this survival in the heart of their loved ones is destined to end. God, on the contrary, never passes away and we all exist by virtue of his love. We exist because he loves us, because he conceived of us and called us to life. We exist in God's thoughts and in God's love. We exist in the whole of our reality, not only in our "shadow". Our serenity, our hope and our peace are based precisely on this: in God, in his thoughts and in his love, it is not merely a "shadow" of ourselves that survives but rather we are preserved and ushered into eternity with the whole of our being in him, in his creator love. It is his Love that triumphs over death and gives us eternity and it is this love that we call "Heaven": God is so great that he also makes room for us. And Jesus the man, who at the same time is God, is the guarantee for us that the being-man and the being-God can exist and live, the one within the other, for eternity.

This means that not only a part of each one of us will continue to exist, as it were pulled to safety, while other parts fall into ruin; on the contrary it means that God knows and loves the whole of the human being, what we are. And God welcomes into his eternity what is developing and becoming *now*, in our life made up of suffering and love, of hope, joy and sorrow. The whole of man, the whole of his life, is taken by God and, purified in him, receives eternity. Dear Friends! I think this is a truth that should fill us with deep joy. Christianity does not proclaim merely some salvation of the soul in a vague afterlife in which all that is precious and dear to us in this world would be eliminated, but promises eternal life, "the life of the world to come". Nothing that is precious and dear to us will fall into ruin; rather, it will find fullness in God. Every hair of our head is counted, Jesus said one day (cf. Mt 10: 30). The definitive world will also be the fulfilment of this earth, as St Paul says: "Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8: 21). Then we understand that Christianity imparts a strong hope in a bright future and paves the way to the realization of this future. We are called, precisely as Christians, to build this new world, to work so that, one day, it may become the "world of God", a world that will surpass all that we ourselves have been able to build. In Mary taken up into Heaven, who fully shares in the Resurrection of the Son, we contemplate the fulfilment of the human creature in accordance with "God's world".

Let us pray the Lord that he will enable us to understand how precious in his eyes is the whole of our life; may he strengthen our faith in eternal life; make us people of hope who work to build a world open to God, people full of joy who can glimpse the beauty of the future world amidst the worries of daily life and in this certainty live, believe and hope. Amen!

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