



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 15 August 2001

1. *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (I Cor 15,26).*

Paul's words that we have just heard in the Second Reading help us to understand the significance of the solemnity we are celebrating today. Christ's definitive victory over death, which came into the world because of Adam's sin, shines out in Mary, assumed into Heaven at the end of her earthly life. It was Christ, the "new" Adam, who conquered death, offering himself as a sacrifice on Calvary in loving obedience to the Father. In this way he redeemed us from the slavery of sin and evil. In the Virgin's triumph, the Church contemplates her whom the Father chose as the true Mother of his Only-begotten Son, closely associating her with the salvific plan of the Redemption.

This is why Mary, as the liturgy points out, is a consoling sign of our hope. In looking to her, carried up amid the rejoicing of the angelic hosts, the whole of human life, marked by lights and shadows, is opened to the perspective of eternal happiness. If our experience of daily life allows us to feel tangibly that our earthly pilgrimage is under the sign of uncertainty and strife, the Virgin assumed into heavenly glory assures us that we will never lack divine help.

2. *"A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun" (Apoc 12,1).* Let us look at Mary, dear brothers and sisters who are gathered here on a day so dear to the devotion of the Christian people. I greet you with deep affection. I greet in particular Cardinal Angelo Sodano, my primary collaborator, and the Bishop of Albano with his Auxiliary, and I thank them for their courteous presence. I also greet the parish priest together with the priests who assist him, the religious and all the faithful present, especially the consecrated Salesians and the communities of Castel Gandolfo and of the Pontifical Villas. I greet the pilgrims speaking various languages who

have wished to join in our celebration. I hope that each one will joyfully live today's solemnity, which offers so much food for meditation.

Today a great sign appears for us in heaven: the Virgin Mother! The sacred author of the Book of the Apocalypse speaks of her to us in the First Reading. What an extraordinary miracle meets our astonished eyes! Used to looking at earthly realities, we are invited to lift our gaze: to heaven, which is our definitive homeland, where the Blessed Virgin awaits us.

Perhaps, more than in the past, modern man is consumed by material interests and concerns. He seeks security and often feels lonely and anxious. Then what can be said of the enigma of death? Mary's Assumption is an event that concerns us precisely because every human being is destined to die. But death is not the last word. Death - the mystery of the Virgin's Assumption assures us - is the passage to life, the encounter with Love. It is the passage to the eternal happiness in store for those who toil for truth and justice and do their utmost to follow Christ.

3. "*Henceforth all generations will call me blessed*" (Lk 1,48). This is what the Mother of Christ exclaimed when she met Elizabeth, her elderly kinswoman. Once again the Gospel has just presented the *Magnificat* to us. It is Our Lady's response to St Elizabeth's prophetic words: "*Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord*" (Lk 1,45).

In Mary the promise is fulfilled: the Mother is blessed and we her children will be blessed if, like her, we listen to and put into practice the Lord's words.

May today's solemnity open our hearts to this superior view of life. May the Virgin, whom today we contemplate in splendour at her Son's right hand, help contemporary man to live believing "in the fulfilment of the Lord's words".

4. "*Today the children of the Church on earth are joyfully celebrating the Virgin's passing to the celestial city, the heavenly Jerusalem*" (*Laudes et hymni*, VI). This is what the Armenian liturgy sings today. I make these words my own, thinking of my apostolic pilgrimage to Kazakhstan and Armenia on which, please God, I shall be setting out in just over a month. To you, Mary, I entrust the success of this new stage in my service to the Church and to the world. I ask you to help believers to be watchmen of the hope that does not disappoint and never to stop proclaiming that Christ is victorious over evil and death. Faithful Woman, enlighten the humanity of our time so that it may understand that every human life is not extinguished in a handful of dust, but is called to a destiny of eternal happiness. Mary, "*who are the joy of heaven and of earth*", may you watch over and pray for us and for the whole world, now and for ever. Amen!

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