

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Homilist: Archbishop Martin W. Currie

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven.

For many years theologians and bishops disputed this teaching; and it was only on November 1, 1950, that Pius XII defined the Dogma of Mary's Assumption with these words:

‘The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed, body and soul, into heavenly glory.’

In past years and still in some countries the Feast is a Holy Day of Obligation.

In Newfoundland and Labrador in the past it was referred to as Lady Day and the fishermen gave their catch of fish that day to the parish account since in the days when the merchants controlled the fishery it was a cashless society.

There are many things about Mary the other Dogma is Her Immaculate Conception. Mary has appeared at various times; hence we have Our Lady of Guadalupe, Fatima, Lourdes.

Sometimes I feel we become confused, when speaking of Mary, as one lady said, these are all cousins aren't they?

I would like to speak of this woman named Mary whom we honor today and about whom we know so little as she has intrigued us for twenty centuries.

Her picture has appeared on many magazines, books have been written about her, as well as, movies.

We don't know when she was born or when she died, but we can place her in history, we know where she lived; and who were some of her family and friends.

Why does she persist through the ages? What is her appeal? The answer is to be found in her human journey with God which is in reality our journey.

When we first meet her, Mary is the object of an ugly rumor.

She is pregnant without a husband. The fiancé Joseph, is minded officially to deny her and put her at a distance. That she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit was not believed.

So right away, people down the ages, who have suffered false rumors, who have had their reputations soiled, who have been misunderstood and maligned, unwed mothers, have identified with her.

then, too, there is human anxiety and fear ---
What's all this Mother of God business?
How can this be?
What does God want?
What about Joseph?
How can this happen?
How can I do this?

Confused and scared and full of questions, Mary is all those throughout the ages who have cried out.

How can I tackle the challenges?
How can I survive?
What does God want of me?

When her son was born, shepherds and angels rejoiced but powerbrokers seethed and conspired to kill her baby.

They wanted His life, His spirit.

Down through the ages and today, faced with so many soul assassins have identified with Mary.

Parents today know also that there are people out there waiting to kill their children. The people who call for abortion, those waiting to sell their children drugs, the media that glamorizes uncommitted sex –

Those who have cash registers for hearts, who try to teach that we live by bread alone, those who present false values to kill the spirit of children. Parents know what Mary knew and fear what she feared.

Mary had to flee with her husband and child and become a refugee in a foreign land.

All the displaced persons, the homeless. The millions of refugees spread around the world, those lonely people who need to be lifted up. They are able to identify with Mary.

When Jesus is a teenager, Mary loses her child, can't find him in a crowded city. She becomes every parent, every teacher in history who can't communicate with a teenager who loses them to drugs, the sex trade, runaways –

Many can identify with Mary here.

At some point we don't know when this wife and mother becomes a widow.

She buried her husband and everyone who has lost a spouse have cried Mary's tears, felt the emptiness and loneliness can identify with her.

When her Son is old enough He leaves home to begin His mission. He leaves a widowed mother behind.

Every mother and father who have seen their children grow up and leave them behind, especially those in nursing homes know what Mary is feeling in her heart.

Mary walks the streets alone, a woman in an occupied territory with no rights, expropriated and pushed around, subjected to exploitation and discrimination.

Everyone with no rights, every minority figure who has had to swallow their pride, those who are with different ethnic backgrounds, colour, gender or racial differences.

Her son's preaching is popular for a while, then He is caught, betrayed, mock trial, beaten and humiliated and hung on a public cross like a common criminal.

She arrives to see him hanging there and wants to go to Him but is held back by the soldiers.

Every parent who has seen their child on a cross,
Every parents who has seen their children carted off to prison,

Every parent who wants to help their adult children deal with addiction,

Living in sin,
Raising their children,
Not even having them baptized,
Going through divorce.

Every parent who witness such crucifixions but must keep their distance, who are told to butt out can identify with Mary and have to pray and suffer in silence.

And finally she cradles the dead body of her only son in her arms and sobs

- every parent who has lost a child, a friend, a classmate, through murder or suicide can identify with Mary.

This is the woman – this pilgrim, who... savored the ups and downs of life in this, is the woman for all ages who has given us a legacy.

“Son, behold thy Mother”.

And here we are today beholding her. But it is good to know that we are beholding her, now that it’s all over.

We often tend to glamorize Mary as if she wasn’t real. Fatima, Lourdes etc.,

Mary was assumed into heaven, this is a sign of hope for us.

What she has become... we hope to be. Mary gives us an example to follow.

She is the woman of faith – who said “Yes” to God and she is the faithful woman, faithful to the ultimate consequences.

When she held the broken body of her Son. May Mary, the ideal Christian, the Blessed one, be for us, a woman for all times and all seasons.