

Homily for the Assumption

Today we celebrate the assumption of Mary into heaven, the firm belief of our faith that we also celebrate as the fourth glorious mystery. Between 1849 and 1950, the Vatican received requests from 13 cardinals, 2500 bishops, 60, 000 priests and religious brothers and sisters, and over 6,000,000 of the laity asking the Pope to define the Assumption as an infallible dogma. And so, on , 1950 Pope Pius became the first Pope to invoke papal infallibility in nearly a century and declared it a matter of divinely revealed faith that “The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever virgin Mary, after completing her course of life on earth, was assumed to the glory of heave both body and soul.”

Why was it so important to define this dogma? I will propose two reasons among many possible ones. First of all, by assuming Mary into heaven, Jesus was indicating the importance of motherhood, for it is clear that while He could have accomplished salvation without assuming Mary, He chose not to do so. He so loved His mother that He would not reign in heaven without her, body and soul at His side. Why then, one may ask, did He not assume Joseph as well? Did He not wish to reign with His foster father, body and soul as well? One answer is that He had different roles for them. Through His mother, He would indicate to us the first fruits of the resurrection of the dead that will occur at the end of time, in which all the souls of the just are fully united. Through Joseph, He wished to join us in the partial separation that occurs while we struggle until Christ comes again, with other loved ones separated from us through death. Certainly, the faithful departed are united with us in the communion of saints; they pray for us and we for those being prepared for heaven. The faithful departed are thus present to us, but not fully, not with the fullness of their nature as we would wish. And so there is a longing for that full unity, the longing that Jesus and Joseph share in Joseph’s death, awaiting the resurrection of His body.

Second, and on a related point, by assuming His mother into heaven, Jesus was, nineteen centuries early, already combating false materialism and a false feminism that would exalt power above all things. His mother did not on have an exalted position in an earthly sense and in fact was largely spurned by society because of her unexpected pregnancy. She humbly accepted difficult circumstances that also included giving birth in a stable and being exiled to Egypt shortly thereafter. Her only known demonstration of power was her request that Jesus help out at the wedding at Cana and her command to the waiters, “Do whatever He [that is Jesus] tells you.” And yet she and not the powers of the world, or even the early leaders of the Church was exalted above all else to reign, body and soul as Queen of Heaven and earth. As the Second Vatican II Council put it she “was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of Lords and conqueror of sin and death.” This fact demonstrates that glory in heaven is not dependent upon power on earth or even upon authority within the Church. Such authority is certainly a means of giving glory to God, especially within the Church, but they are not the only or even the highest means.

I have celebrated a Mass, preached and presided at a Holy Hour for the Poor Clares in Alexandria. In so doing, I was exercising an authority that they do not have. But I would admit, and gladly admit that their life is a higher one than mine and will if they follow it, as they no

doubt do, lead to a higher place in heaven. For entry into heaven and glory in heaven is a result, not of power or authority on earth, but rather of exercising the virtues, and especially faith, hope and charity consistently on earth and, with the example and guidance of Mary and the angels and saints, reflecting the adorable will of God.