

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Solemnity of the Assumption

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*Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
Baltimore*

Aug. 15, 2018

As you arrived today, you saw, etched in chalk, an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, assumed into heaven, on the bricks in front of the basilica portico.

It is the same image that you see in the ceiling of the basilica, the woman clothed with the sun on whose head is a crown of twelve stars.

Gazing at these images we are reminded that Mary, the Mother of God, was assumed body and soul into heaven where she, a mortal like us, reigns in glory with her son.

Listening to the readings, we are reminded that she was chosen from among women, that she was set apart, destined to become the mother of the Savior. She was preserved from original sin and overshadowed by the Holy Spirit so that, while remaining a virgin, she conceived and gave birth to the incarnate Son of God.

Hearing of her unique role and the special graces God in his providence granted her, we may be tempted to think that the rest of Mary's life was on autopilot.

We say to ourselves, "Of course, she remained free of sin!"

"Of course, she could say to the angel, 'Let it be done to me according to your Word.'"

Why wouldn't she have been her son's most ardent disciple? And why would she have followed him all the way to Calvary?

Mary's Everyday Existence

But Mary's life did not run on autopilot. Every moment of her life she had to cooperate with God's graces. She had to say "yes" to each of the graces and favors God sent to her, even when she did not fully understand what she was living through.

Think of the misunderstandings and hardships she suffered in conceiving and giving birth to the savior.

Think of the Simeon's predication that her heart would be pierced with sorrow.

Think of how hard it was for Mary to let Jesus go, to surrender him to the fulfillment of the work God the Father had given him to do. Thus she loses him in the temple and later waits outside where Jesus was preaching only to be seemingly rebuffed.

Think, above all, about what it meant for Mary to walk the way of the cross and to stand beneath it, sharing fully in her son's sufferings for our salvation.

Every one of these extraordinary episodes in her life required of her a wholehearted "yes" to a plan of God she did not fully understand. In between were thousands of smaller "yeses" that she uttered, as she went about living an ordinary existence in this world, cooking, cleaning, drawing water, sewing and all the vexations and mischance that are part of everyday life.

Faith, holiness, peace of mind and heart came to Mary scarcely easier than they do to us. For all her privileges she did not lose her free will and could have said "no" to God at any point along the way.

The point is, she didn't.

She not only gave birth to Jesus, she also shared in his death to such an extent that she now fully shares his glory, body and soul in heaven.

Mary Close to Us

And we see portrayals of Mary's being assumed into heaven and we say to ourselves, two things – she's at least free from the bonds of this earth and now, alas, she is

distant from us, far removed from her former life on earth.

The point of this feast is not that Mary has shaken off our mortality nor is it that she has removed herself from this vale of tears. Quite the opposite.

When Mary was on this earth, only a few people knew her but now that she is glorified in heaven, all of us can know and love her and she is close to us in a new and beautiful way, bending down in love, interceding for us, encouraging us.

We honor her today at a moment when the Church is in crisis, when the Lord has been betrayed by those he appointed shepherds of his people, by those who were to proclaim the Gospel, not contradict it with their lives.

We celebrate Mary's triumph in a moment that feels rather like the Church's nadir. Mary, who witnessed the betrayal of her son and the cowardice of his disciples, knows, better than we do, what we are going through, why we feel as we do, and she is close to us with an amazingly tender maternal love . . . let us turn to her.

Mary who witnessed the betrayal of her son by those who were his own in the world teaches us to be steadfast, to stand beneath the cross, not to allow the betrayal of others, even shepherds, to destroy our faith, and to utter "yes" even when it is unimaginably difficult to do so.

Mary is glorified in heaven not because her life in the world was easy but because amid its extreme difficulty, she never ceased saying "yes" to God, moment by moment, until the moments of her life became an eternity of joy.

Mary assumed body and soul into heaven, pray for us!