

Mass - Feast of the Assumption

Our Lady must be very pleased with this historic Church and all of you who join us on this special day. Our minds are lifted up to heaven, and our hearts should follow there, as we remember that this feast is one of the earliest celebrated in all of Christendom, after Easter and Christmas.

This feast this year is linked with that of the Immaculate Conception. More than any other person Mary shared in the redemptive work of her son, Jesus. Put very simply, she had a first, a primary share in his victory was over sin and death. That is the way St. Paul summed it up in his letter to the Romans.

Yesterday Pope John Paul II flew to Lourdes, in France, and this morning he celebrated Mass there. Despite his own illness, he preached his entire homily, bringing hope and consolation to other sufferers present. Lourdes is the shrine that has drawn people from throughout the world, seeking cures for bodily ills and often finding more valuable and enduring cures for spiritual ailments.

Pope John Paul II has announced that his present visit to Lourdes is to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception by his predecessor, Blessed Pope Pius IX. Archbishop Francis Patrick Kenrick led the delegation of Americans present in Rome on December 8, 1854, for the proclamation of the dogma. This was not a new teaching but a precise formulation of the ancient teaching found in the angel's words to Mary, hailing her as "full of grace." What her Son had won by his death on the cross was the first fruits of his victory over Satan, a share in the Divine Life.

Today we celebrate in the Feast of the Assumption, another phase of Our Lady's share in the victory of her Son over the consequences of the sin of our first parents. Jesus rose from the dead. He had his mother also rise from the dead, a fact celebrated by one of the most ancient feasts of the Church in both the East, where it is called the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, and in the West.

From the homily today of Pope John Paul II in Lourdes, I present these words of the Holy Father taken from the website of the Holy See:

3. "In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country..." (Lk 1:39). The words of the Gospel story have once more brought before the eyes of our hearts the young maiden of Nazareth as she makes her way to that "city of Judah" where her kinswoman Elizabeth lived, in order to be of help to her.

What strikes us about Mary is above all her loving concern for her elderly relative. Hers is a practical love, one which is not limited to words of understanding but is deeply and personally involved in giving help. The Blessed Virgin does not merely give her cousin something of herself; she gives her whole self asking nothing in return. Mary understood perfectly that the gift she received from God is more than a privilege; it is a duty which obliges her to serve others with the selflessness proper to love.

4. "My soul magnifies the Lord..." (Lk 1:46) Mary's sentiments in her meeting with Elizabeth are forcefully expressed in the canticle of the Magnificat. Her words convey the hope-filled expectation of the "poor of the Lord" and at the same time an awareness that God has fulfilled his promises, for he "has remembered his mercy" (cf. Lk 1:52-53).

This same awareness is the source of that joy of the Virgin Mary which pervades the whole canticle: joy in knowing that she has been "looked upon" by God despite her own "lowliness" (cf Lk 1:48); joy in the "service" she is able to offer because of the "great things" to which the Almighty has called her (cf. Lk 1:49); joy in her foretaste of the eschatological blessedness promised to "those of low degree" and "the hungry" (cf. Lk 1:52-53).

The Magnificat is followed by silence: nothing is said to us about the three months that Mary stayed with her kinswoman Elizabeth, Yet perhaps we are told the most important