

Assumption Homily “Medicine for troubled times”

Fr. Frank Schuster

It is good to be back from my vacation! I had a good relaxing time, spending the best parts of it with family. It culminated with a family reunion in Spokane last weekend. And it was a very joyful time for us even as we all carried with us our concerns of what is going on in parts of our county and world today. Of course, during the time of Elizabeth and Mary, the world was an even more difficult place as we all know. It seems like the remedy the Church offers for all the worries we have in our world today is the image of two expectant mothers embracing each other in celebration of the hope they have in the future. Good medicine. After all, babies are God’s argument that the world should go on.

And so, Mary in the Gospel gives us her Magnificat! That is what we call the wonderful poetry coming from the mouth of Mary, the Magnificat. A miraculous thing had occurred. Mary, a young Jewish girl, had accepted the invitation from the Angel Gabriel to become the Mother of our Lord. Elizabeth, in her old age, had received the blessing of a son who would become the new Elijah in St. John the Baptist. Elizabeth and Mary were blessed with the miracle of life. And this alone was reason for them to embrace and rejoice together. Elizabeth and Mary were also cognizant that they both had even more to celebrate than this. They were the first recipients of the Gospel of Salvation, Mary, especially, for she gave to the invisible God our full humanity.

You see, every doctrine we have about Mary, the Mother of our Lord, is ultimately confessions about what we believe about her son Jesus Christ. We believe that humanity is plagued by original sin, that terrible instinct inside of us which rebels against the Author of Life. The effects of original sin plague our world with sin and death. GK Chesterton, as many of you remember jokingly wrote that original sin is the only doctrine we have that has empirical evidence. However, his insight is no joke as we look at the news each day. One only needs to look at what is going on in parts of our country and around the world to see original sin in all its glory. Original sin can be understood as a spiritual cancer at work in the heart of the human race that makes humanity less than human, which is to say, less than what God had intended us to be. The imagination at work here is if our human nature has been deformed by original sin, God’s solution was to send his Son to us with a full human nature so to recreate our human nature for the sake of our salvation.

Theologians rightfully asked the question: how would our divine Lord attain a full human nature unless Mary his mother was also fully human, that is to say, without the stain of original sin? And so in the stormy waters of sin and death, God created an island in Mary. Through Christ's redemptive activity on the cross, which transcends time, Mary was kept free of original sin so to be fully human, so she could be for us a new Eve. And how fitting it is that if from the body of Adam came forth Eve, then from the Body of Mary, the new Eve, should come forth the new Adam, our Savior and Lord.

My friends, God does not want human beings to die. Indeed, the sin and death at work in our world makes human beings less than human, less than what God wants for us. God wants us to be perfectly human and live with him forever. Mary had to be fully human if Jesus was to unite his divinity with the fullness of our humanity and thereby opening the doors to heaven for those who die and rise with Jesus in the waters of baptism.

And this brings us to our feast day today of the Assumption of Mary. You see, if Mary was born originally fully human, it simply isn't fitting that she should taste death the way we do. Like the angel who recognized that Mary was full of grace, which is to say fully human, it is more fitting that Mary be assumed into heaven body and soul. Because of her unique relationship with Christ, it is fitting that Mary be the first to receive the gift Christ wants to give us all: eternal life with God. How wonderful that the first recipient of this gift would be a woman who, when she was a poor teenage Jewish girl, said yes to God and not no. Mary is therefore the first disciple, the first model for us all, but also she is hope for us all.

In the Gospel today, Mary has a moment of profound joy when she praises God for the good he has done. Today is a Holy Day because the Church wants to celebrate with her. Today also offers us an opportunity I think for a moment of defiant joy in the midst of so many worries we face in the world today and in our own lives. There is so much going on in our world that can tempt us away from joy. The Church's remedy for this is to show us two expectant mothers embracing each other in celebration of the hope they have in the future. It is good medicine. The invitation today is to share their hope and share their joy regarding the salvation promised us by God through Jesus Christ, as heralded by John the Baptist. Even with all the worries that surround us each day, our faith in the resurrection gives us reason to hope as we join Mary in her timeless prayer, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my savior".