

## Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary “Share in Mary’s Joy”

Bishop Frank Schuster

The feast day of the Assumption of Mary into heaven comes at a good time given all the concerns we carry inside of us of what is going on in the world today. Our hearts go out to the those devastated by the fires in Hawaii, and we are called to find ways to be of assistance to those in need. We also continue to pray for peace in Ukraine and so many other places in the world desperate to know peace. Archbishop Etienne last week participated in a pilgrimage of peace in Japan to raise awareness of the need for leaders throughout the world to work toward nuclear disarmament. At World Youth Day, Pope Francis acknowledged that there are so many heavy concerns on the hearts of our young people with all the unrealistic expectations placed on their shoulders today. He called on our youth to turn to Jesus who understands them and loves them. Indeed, every one of us comes to Church today with some anxiety or worry about something going on in our life. The same was true when Mary visited Elizabeth in our Gospel reading. It is good to remember that during the time of Elizabeth and Mary, the world was an even more difficult place to live in. 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. This is good medicine. With all that we deal with in life, the hope we have in the future given to us in Jesus Christ gives us cause to rejoice in a way those who do not have this hope simply can't.

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. How then to understand why this feast day of the Assumption of Mary into heaven at the moment of death or immediately after is such Good News?

You see, every doctrine we have about Mary, the mother of our Lord, is ultimately confessions about what we believe about her son Jesus. Humanity is plagued by sin as we all know. If God is the Author of life, rebelling against God leads us to spiritual death and despair. Indeed, original sin can be understood as a spiritual cancer at work in the heart of humanity 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 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, to steer us from the path of death to the path of life.

Theologians rightfully asked the question: how would our divine Lord attain a full human nature unless Mary his mother was also fully human without the stain of original sin? And so, in the stormy waters of sin and death, God created an island in Mary. This is why the angel Gabriel describes her as “full of grace”. 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, so to speak, a new mother for the human race.

My friends, God does not want human beings to follow the path of death. God wants us to be fully alive, fully human and to live with him forever. Through Mary, Jesus gains the original vision of what it means to be fully human, a vision we can all share in by living our baptism in the Body of Christ. 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 at the moment of death, or immediately following her death. 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. How many of us can find ourselves saying no to God when we really should be saying yes. Mary's “yes” makes her the first disciple, the first model for us all, but she is also 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 also offers us an opportunity I think for a moment to choose joy amid 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 hope. Again, 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. With all we go through, we need their hope. We need to make their hope our hope. The invitation today is to share their hope and share their joy that comes from 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 Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, gives us a reason to find ways to join Mary in her timeless prayer, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my savior”.