

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

<i>First Reading</i>	Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab
<i>Response</i>	...at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 45:10, 11, 12, 16
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 15:20-27
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Mary is taken up to heaven; a chorus of angels exults.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 1:39-56

Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, body and soul into Heaven. And in our journey through the second readings, looking at the letters from the New Testament, we encounter a passage from 1 Corinthians 15 that the Church gives us for the Solemnity of Mary's Assumption.

And it's one of these times where it's not at first glance immediately apparent why the Church has chosen this particular verse for this particular feast, but we'll read it and we'll try to unpack it, and I think it will become clear once we do that. So let's look at 1 Corinthians 15:20-27. And this is a very famous passage about the Eschaton, about the end of the world, about the end of the age, about the second coming of Christ at the final judgment.

And so we might think, gosh, this doesn't have anything to do with the Assumption, but if we read through it, we'll see some connections here if we keep that topic in mind. This is what it says:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under

his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. “For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.”¹

Now you might be thinking, or at least I was certainly thinking when I was trying to prepare this video . . . What does this have to do with Mary’s Assumption into Heaven? So let me give you a few clues here to what the Church is thinking when She selected this particular passage from Paul. First, notice the importance of Adam — very important. This is one of those passages where Paul says:

For as by a man came death...

And in saying that, he’s alluding — like he does in Romans 5 also — to the coming of sin and death into the world through the transgression of Adam. So this is an allusion to Adam. And he’s drawing a kind of typological contrast between Adam and the Old Testament and Christ and the New Testament. So as by Adam, death came into the world (one man), so through Christ (one man) the Resurrection of the dead is coming into the world.

So this is a classic example of Paul’s assumption (that he frequently operates) of two creations, the old creation and the new creation — two spheres of reality. The old creation is the sphere of reality that is under the power of Adam, and it’s under the sphere of Adam’s sin and the tragic consequences of Adam’s transgression. It’s the fallen world around us that we see.

And then the realm of Christ or the new creation is what begins on Easter Sunday morning when Christ rises from the dead and ushers in a whole new phase of human history, but also a new kind of body — His glorified body — which is the first fruits of the new creation, the beginning of the new creation.

And so what Paul is saying here is just as everyone who is in Adam (part of the mystical body of Adam) dies because of Adam’s sin, so too in Christ everyone who is part of the Mystical Body of Christ will be made alive through the power of His

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

Resurrection. And Christ is the first fruits of that resurrection. Just like the Jews in the temple in the spring would chop down the first sheaf of grain and they'd bring it and offer it up to God as the first fruits of the harvest, but then later on they go and gather the rest of the grain in the fullness of the harvest, so too Christ is the first fruits of the Resurrection of the dead. He experiences in the middle of time what the rest of humanity will experience at the end of time in the final harvest of the resurrection of the dead.

Very important point for us to remember, that Jews were waiting for the resurrection of the dead, but they were waiting for it to happen at the end of time, at the end of the old creation. And what's mysterious about what ended up happening is that Christ, when Jesus was raised from the dead, what the Jews expected to happen to everyone at the end of time, happens to one person in the middle of time. So He's like the first sheaf of grain that's cut down and then raised up to new life. He's the beginning of the resurrection of the dead, but not because He's the only one who will be raised from the dead, but as a sign as of what will happen to everyone at the end of time ... and not just at the end of time. You actually see in the Gospel of Matthew, he says:

... the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised ... (Matthew 27:52)

And they appeared in the city to many. So in a sense, Jesus' Resurrection sets off a chain reaction that will come to its full completion in the new creation at the final judgment in the resurrection of the dead.

And when that happens, at His *parousia*, as Paul says:

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." (1 Corinthians 15:25-27a)

And here's where I think the link is with Mary, because the image of putting an enemy under your feet or crushing them under your feet is an allusion all the way back to the book of Genesis, the famous prophecy of the war between the woman

and the serpent. So if you go back to Genesis 3:15, there's this famous prophecy called the *Protoevangelium*, or the First Gospel. It's in the words of God to the serpent, which He curses after the first transgression of Adam, when He says these words. He says in verse 15:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

So there's this battle between the woman and the serpent, and between the woman's offspring and serpent's offspring. And it says that the offspring of the woman is going to crush the head of the serpent under his foot. So it's an image of subjection. So if you look at ancient Christian writers, ancient Church Fathers, you look at the Doctors of the Church, they all saw this as a prophecy not just of the coming of Christ the Messiah (who would overthrow the works of the devil) but also of the Mother of the Messiah who would give birth to the One who would crush the head of the serpent.

And so in my book, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*, again I cover this in much more depth in the chapter on Mary as the new Eve. What I show there is that just as Christ is the one man, the new Adam through whom salvation comes into the world, so too Mary is the new Eve, the one woman who is in herself the beginning of the new creation. This is so very important.

So if Christ is the new Adam and Mary is the new Eve, then just as Christ tastes the gift of the Resurrection and the glory of the life to come before everyone else in advance, as a sign of the beginning of the new creation, so too in Mary's bodily Assumption, in the fact that her body and soul are incorruptible and assumed into Heaven, it means that Mary as the new Eve gets to experience now what we will all experience in the Resurrection at the end of time. She's an eschatological sign of the fact that resurrection of the body isn't just for Jesus; it's also for other human beings. It isn't just for the God Man; it's for ordinary human beings.

And although Mary is not an ordinary human being, she is fully human. She is just a creature, and yet she participates in the glory of the Resurrection and the life of the world to come in her body now, already. So if He's the first fruits of the Resurrection, she's like a second sheaf. She gets to taste it in advance.

And you can see this understanding of Mary as the new Eve is everywhere in the ancient Church Fathers, but let me give you a couple of quotes just as an example. So St. Irenaeus of Lyons, this is in the 2nd century AD around 180 AD. He's only one generation removed from the apostles. He says this:

[T]he knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.²

That's from his *Against Heresies*, book 3.22. Then St. Jerome of Stridon, great biblical scholar, late 4th, early 5th century said famously:

Death came through Eve, but life has come through Mary.³

That's Jerome's letter. Now some people might react saying, "Whoa, that's going too far. Life comes through Christ, not through Mary." And Jerome here is, of course, he knows that. But he's talking about Christ Himself, because Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14), how does He come into this world? He comes into this world through Mary. So if He is the new Adam, she is the new Eve.

But notice things are reversed. In the first order of creation, Adam comes first, and then Eve comes into the world through Adam, because she's created from his side in Genesis 2. But in the new creation, Eve comes first, and the new Adam comes through her, comes from her. So life comes into the world through Eve. So this is beautiful typology that Jerome has given us.

² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4 (2nd century A.D)

³ Jerome, *Letters* 22.21 (4th-5th century A.D.); trans. Scaff, *NPNF2*, 6:30

And then finally — this is important — Benedict XVI, reflecting on this in his “Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption” for August 15, 2011, says:

...Mary, Mother of God, full of grace, fully docile to the action of the Holy Spirit, *already lives in God’s Heaven with her whole being, body and soul.*”⁴

And notice that “already.” This is what’s unique about Mary. As the new Eve, she gets to taste the first fruits of the Resurrection. She gets to taste the glory of the Resurrection already *in advance*. All of us? We’re going to have to wait. We have to wait until the end of time. In fact, there’s a powerful passage in the book of Revelation 6 where the martyrs — chapter 6, verse 9. The martyrs cry out in longing for the Resurrection to take place ... and for the final judgment. It says:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (Revelation 6:9-11)

So notice the martyrs, the souls — not their bodies, it’s the *souls* — of the martyrs, they’re in Heaven. They’re under the altar in Heaven, but they’re still waiting for the final judgment. “How long, O Lord, til you judge the earth?” And God says in response, “You’re going to have to wait until the full number of martyrs is complete.”

By contrast, in Revelation 11 and 12, when John sees the woman clothed in the sun, she’s in Heaven. She’s in Heaven, but it appears she has a body, because she’s:

... clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars ...

⁴ Benedict XVI, “Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption,” August 15, 2011

So this passage, as I've mentioned in other videos, was interpreted by the ancient Church Fathers, as a vision of Mary in glory.

So what Benedict is saying here — to come back to him — is that Mary already tastes the bodily glorification and the Resurrection of the body that all of us are going to have to wait for until the end of time. Even the greatest saints — St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Therese of Lisieux — they're only in Heaven in their souls. Their bodies are still on Earth. Some are incorrupt, some are corrupt, but they're still waiting for their reunification of body and soul in Heaven.

Mary doesn't have to wait. She actually is a sign to us of our own future hope that, as we say in the Creed, we believe not just in the immortality of the soul, but the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. As the new Eve, she's a sign to us of our hope that one day, just as she was assumed body and soul into Heaven to taste the heavenly glory of being with Christ forever, so too, one day, we, after the Resurrection, will also share in that glory of the new creation of the Resurrection of the body, of the life of the world to come ... not just in our souls, but in our bodies.

And that's one reason why in the Salve Regina, the Hail Holy Queen, we say:

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
our life, our sweetness and our hope.