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Dormition and Assumption: Magisterium, Saints, Poets

Texts from the Magisterium of the Church, saints and Christian poets on our Lady's passage from this world and entry into heaven.

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VOICE OF THE MAGISTERIUM

We must remember especially that, since the second century, the Virgin

Mary has been designated by the holy Fathers as the new Eve, who, although subject to the new Adam, is most intimately associated with him in that struggle against the infernal foe which, as foretold in the protoevangelium, would finally result in that most complete victory over the sin and death which are always mentioned together in the writings of the Apostle of the Gentiles. Consequently, just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and the final sign of this victory, so that struggle which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her divine Son should be brought to a close by the glorification of her virginal body, for the same Apostle says: "When this mortal thing hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory."

Hence the revered Mother of God, from all eternity joined in a hidden way with Jesus Christ in one and the same decree of predestination, immaculate in her conception, a most perfect virgin in her divine motherhood, the noble associate of the divine Redeemer who has won a complete triumph over sin and its consequences, finally obtained, as the supreme culmination of her privileges, that she should be preserved free from the corruption of the tomb and that, like her own Son, having overcome death, she might be taken up body and soul to the glory of heaven where, as Queen, she sits in splendor at the right hand of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages.

Since the universal Church, within which dwells the Spirit of Truth who infallibly directs it toward an ever more perfect knowledge of the revealed truths, has expressed its

own belief many times over the course of the centuries, and since the bishops of the entire world are almost unanimously petitioning that the truth of the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven should be defined as a dogma of divine and Catholic faith—this truth which is based on the Sacred Writings, which is thoroughly rooted in the minds of the faithful, which has been approved in ecclesiastical worship from the most remote times, which is completely in harmony with the other revealed truths, and which has been expounded and explained magnificently in the work, the science, and the wisdom of the theologians—we believe that the moment appointed in the plan of divine providence for the solemn proclamation of this outstanding privilege of the Virgin Mary has already arrived.

from Pius XII, Apost. Const.
Munificentissimus Deus, November 1,
1950, nos. 39-41.

Could Mary of Nazareth have experienced the drama of death in her own flesh? Reflecting on Mary's destiny and her relationship with her divine Son, it seems legitimate to answer in the affirmative: since Christ died, it would be difficult to maintain the contrary for his Mother....

It is true that in Revelation death is presented as a punishment for sin. However, the fact that the Church proclaims Mary free from original sin by a unique divine privilege does not lead to the conclusion that she also received physical immortality. The Mother is not superior to the Son who underwent death, giving it a new meaning and changing it into a means of salvation. Involved in Christ's redemptive work and

associated in his saving sacrifice, Mary was able to share in his suffering and death for the sake of humanity's Redemption. What Severus of Antioch says about Christ also applies to her: "Without a preliminary death, how could the Resurrection have taken place?" (*Antijulianistica*, Beirut 1931, 194f.). To share in Christ's Resurrection, Mary had first to share in his death.

The New Testament provides no information on the circumstances of Mary's death. This silence leads one to suppose that it happened naturally, with no detail particularly worthy of mention. If this were not the case, how could the information about it have remained hidden from her contemporaries and not have been passed down to us in some way?

As to the cause of Mary's death, the opinions that wish to exclude her

from death by natural causes seem groundless. It is more important to look for the Blessed Virgin's spiritual attitude at the moment of her departure from this world. In this regard, St Francis de Sales maintains that Mary's death was due to a transport of love. He speaks of a dying "in love, from love and through love," going so far as to say that the Mother of God died of love for her Son Jesus (*Treatise on the Love of God*, bk. 7, ch. XIII-XIV).

Whatever from the physical point of view was the organic, biological cause of the end of her bodily life, it can be said that for Mary the passage from this life to the next was the full development of grace in glory, so that no death can ever be so fittingly described as a "dormition" as hers.

*from John Paul II, General Audience,
June 25, 1997*

VOICE OF THE SAINTS

It was fitting that she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. It was fitting that she, who had carried the Creator as a child at her breast, should dwell in the divine tabernacles. It was fitting that the spouse, whom the Father had taken to himself, should live in the divine mansions. It was fitting that she, who had seen her Son upon the cross and who had thereby received into her heart the sword of sorrow which she had escaped in the act of giving birth to him, should look upon him as he sits with the Father. It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son, and that she should be honored by every creature as the Mother and as the handmaid of God.

from St. John Damascene, *Encomium in Dormitionem Dei Genetricis*

Semperque Virginis Mariae, Hom. II,
no. 14 (7-8th c.)

You are she who, as it is written,
appears in beauty, and your virginal
body is all holy, all chaste, entirely
the dwelling place of God, so that it is
henceforth completely exempt from
dissolution into dust. Though still
human, it is changed into the
heavenly life of incorruptibility, truly
living and glorious, undamaged and
sharing in perfect life.

from St. Germanus of
Constantinople, *In Sanctae Dei*
Genetricis Dormitionem, Sermo I
(7-8th c.)

Thou art all fair, oh my love, and
there is not a spot in thee: *Tota*
pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non
est in te. As soon as she had the use
of reason, that is, from the first
moment of her immaculate
conception in the womb of St. Ann,
from that time she began with all her

powers to love her God; and thus she continued to do, ever advancing more in perfection and love through her whole life. All her thoughts, her desires, her affections, were wholly given to God; not a word, not a motion, not a glance of the eye, not a breath of hers that was not for God and for his glory, never departing one step, nor separating herself for one moment from the divine love. Ah ! in the happy hour of her death how did all the lovely virtues which she practised during her life surround her blessed bed! That faith so constant, that affectionate confidence in God, that patience so strong in the midst of sufferings, that humility in the midst of so many privileges, that modesty, that meekness, that compassion for souls, that zeal for the divine glory, and above all, that perfect charity towards God, with that entire uniformity to the divine will; all, in a word, thronged around her, and

consoling her, said: We are thy works, we will not desert thee: *Opera tua sumus, non te deseremus*. Oh Lady and mother, we are all children of thy loving heart.

from St. Alphonsus Ligouri, "The Glories of Mary" (18th c.)

Assumpta est Maria in coelum: gaudent angeli! God has taken Mary—body and soul—to heaven; and the Angels rejoice!

So sings the Church. And so, with that same outburst of joy, do we begin our contemplation in this decade of the Holy Rosary:

The Mother of God has fallen asleep. Around her bed are the twelve Apostles. —Matthias in the place of Judas.

And we, through a grace respected by all, are also at her side.

But Jesus wants to have his Mother, body and soul, in heaven. And the heavenly court, arrayed in all its splendour, greets our Lady. You and I—children after all—take the train of Mary's magnificent blue cloak, and so we can watch the marvellous scene.

The most Blessed Trinity receives and showers honours on the Daughter, Mother and Spouse of God... And so great is our Lady's majesty that the Angels exclaim: Who is she?

St. Josemaria, "Holy Rosary," Fourth Glorious Mystery

VOICE OF THE POETS

On the Assumption

Harke, she is called, the parting hour is come.

Take thy farewell poor world, heaven
must go home.

A piece of heavenly earth, purer and
brighter

Than the chaste stars, whose choice
lamps come to light her.

While through the crystal orbs,
clearer than they,

She climbs and makes a far more
milky way.

She's called again, hark how the
immortal Dove

Sighs to his silver mate, Rise up, my
love!

Rise up, my fair, my spotless one,

The winter's past, the rain is gone;

The spring is come, the flowers
appear;

No sweets but thou are wanting here.

Come away, my love!

Come away, my dove!

Cast off delay.

The Court of Heaven is come,

To wait upon thee home.

Come away, come away!

by Richard Crashaw (1613-1649)