

Assumption of Mary, our Mother

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Today, in union with the whole Church, we celebrate the triumph of the Mother, Daughter and Spouse of God. It was 58 years ago today, on August 15, 1951, that Josemaria made a difficult trip from Rome along the damaged roads of post war Italy to the shrine of Loreto, which holds the

venerable walls of the the famous "Holy House" where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph lived in Nazareth. The shrine was packed with pilgrims, and he was quite moved at the sight of such piety. Years later, in 1963, he recounted the event in a homily:

I said Mass there. I wanted to say it calmly and reverently, but I hadn't counted on the crowd's fervour. I had forgotten that the faith of the people of the region and their love for the Madonna meant there would be a huge crowd for the feast of the Assumption.

Their piety was not always entirely correct in its expression, at least from the point of view of the Church's liturgical regulations. When I would kiss the altar in accordance with the rubrics, three or four local women would accompany me. It was distracting, but certainly moving. I also noticed that above the altar in

that holy house, which tradition says was the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, these words were written: "Here the Word was made flesh." Here, on a bit of the earth on which we live, in a house built by men, God dwelt.

The Son of God became man, and he is perfectus Deus, perfectus homo: "perfect God and perfect man." There is something in this mystery which should stir Christians. I was and am moved. I should like to go back to Loreto. I go there now in thought and desire, to relive those years of Jesus' childhood and consider once more those words: "Here the Word was made flesh."

Iesus Christus, Deus homo: Jesus Christ, God-man. This is one of "the mighty works of God," which we should reflect upon and thank him for. He has come to bring "peace on earth to men of good Will," to all men

who want to unite their wills to the holy will of God — not just the rich, not just the poor, but everyone: all the brethren. We are all brothers in Jesus, children of God, brothers of Christ. His Mother is our mother.
(Christ is Passing By, 12-13)

...We are now happy that Mary, after accompanying Jesus from Bethlehem to the cross, is next to her Son in body and soul, glorious forever.
(Christ is Passing By, 176)

But don't forget: if God exalted his Mother, it is equally true that he did not spare her pain, exhaustion in her work or trials of her faith. A village woman one day broke into praise for Jesus exclaiming: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nourished you." Jesus said in reply: "Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." It was a compliment to his Mother on her fiat, her "be it done." She lived it

sincerely, unstintingly, fulfilling its every consequence, but never amid fanfare, rather in the hidden and silent sacrifice of each day. ...

To become Godlike, to be divinized, we must begin by being very human, accepting from God our condition as ordinary men and sanctifying its apparent worthlessness. Thus did Mary live. She who is full of grace, the object of God's pleasure, exalted above all the angels and the saints, lived an ordinary life.

Mary is as much a creature as we are, with a heart like ours, made for joy and mirth as well as suffering and tears. Before Gabriel communicates to her God's plan, our Lady does not know she has been chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of the Messiah. She sees herself a humble creature. That is why she can acknowledge, with full humility, that "he who is mighty has

done great things” in her. (Christ is Passing By, 172)

“Mary has been taken up to heaven by God in body and soul, and the angels rejoice.” (Antiphon, vespers, feast of the Assumption: *assumpta est Maria in coelum, gaudent angeli*). Joy overtakes both angels and men. Why is it that we feel today this intimate delight, with our heart brimming over, with our soul full of peace? Because we are celebrating the glorification of our mother, and it is only natural that we her children rejoice in a special way upon seeing how the most Blessed Trinity honors her.

It was on Calvary that Christ, her most blessed Son and our brother, gave her to us as our mother, when he said to St John: “Behold your mother” (John 19:27). And we received her, along with the beloved disciple, in that moment of supreme

grief. The blessed Virgin embraced us in her suffering, as the ancient prophecy was fulfilled: “And a sword shall pierce your own soul” (Luke 2:35). We are all her children, she is the Mother of all mankind. And now, the whole human race commemorates her ineffable assumption. Mary is welcomed to heaven: Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, and Spouse of God the Holy Spirit. (Christ is Passing By, 171)

Our mother is a model of correspondence to grace. If we contemplate her life, our Lord will give us the light we need to divinize our everyday existence. Throughout the year when we celebrate feasts dedicated to Mary and frequently on other days, we Christians can think of the Virgin. If we take advantage of these moments, trying to imagine how she would conduct herself in our circumstances, we will make

steady progress. And in the end we will resemble her, as children come to look like their mother.

First, let us imitate her love. Charity cannot be content with just nice feelings; it must find its way into our conversations and, above all, into our deeds. The Virgin did not merely pronounce her fiat; in every moment she fulfilled that firm and irrevocable decision. So should we. When God's love gets through to us and we come to know what he desires, we ought to commit ourselves to be faithful, loyal and then be so in fact. Because “not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.” (Matt 7:21)

We must imitate her natural and supernatural refinement. She is a privileged creature in the history of salvation, for in Mary “the Word

became flesh and dwelled among us.” (John 1:14). But she is a reserved, quiet witness. She never wished to be praised, for she never sought her own glory. Mary is present at the mysteries surrounding the infancy of her Son, but these are “normal” mysteries, so to speak. When the great miracles take place and the crowds acclaim them in amazement, she is nowhere to be found. In Jerusalem when Christ, riding a little donkey, is proclaimed king, we don't catch a glimpse of Mary. But after all have fled, she reappears next to the cross. This way of acting bespeaks personal greatness and depth, the sanctity of her soul.

Following her example of obedience to God, we can learn to serve delicately without being slavish. In Mary we don't find the slightest trace of the attitude of the foolish virgins, who obey, but thoughtlessly. Our Lady listens attentively to what God

wants, ponders what she doesn't fully understand and asks about what she doesn't know. Then she gives herself completely to doing the divine will: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38). Isn't that marvellous? The blessed Virgin, our teacher in all we do, shows us here that obedience to God is not servile, does not bypass our conscience. We should be inwardly moved to discover the “freedom of the children of God.” (Cf Rom 8:21) (Christ is Passing By, 173)
