



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Thomas of Villanova Parish, Castel Gandolfo

Friday, 15 August 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the oldest Marian Feast, returns every year in the heart of summer. It is an opportunity to rise with Mary to the heights of the spirit where one breathes the pure air of supernatural life and contemplates the most authentic beauty, the beauty of holiness. The atmosphere of today's celebration is steeped in paschal joy. "Today", the antiphon of the *Magnificat* says, "the Virgin Mary was taken up to Heaven. Rejoice, for she reigns with Christ for ever. Alleluia". This proclamation speaks to us of an event that is utterly unique and extraordinary, yet destined to fill the heart of every human being with hope and happiness. Mary is indeed the first fruit of the new humanity, the creature in whom the mystery of Christ - his Incarnation, death, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven - has already fully taken effect, redeeming her from death and conveying her, body and soul, to the Kingdom of immortal life. For this reason, as the Second Vatican Council recalls, the Virgin Mary is a sign of certain hope and comfort to us (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 68). Today's feast impels us to lift our gaze to Heaven; not to a heaven consisting of abstract ideas or even an imaginary heaven created by art, but the Heaven of true reality which is God himself. God is Heaven. He is our destination, the destination and the eternal dwelling place from which we come and for which we are striving.

St Germanus, Bishop of Constantinople in the eighth century, in a homily given on the Feast of the Assumption, addressing the heavenly Mother of God said: "You are the One who through your immaculate flesh reunited the Christian people with Christ.... Just as all who thirst hasten to the fountain, so every soul hastens to you, the Fountain of love, and as every man aspires to live, to see the light that never fades, so every Christian longs to enter the light of the Most Blessed Trinity

where you already are". It is these same sentiments that inspire us today as we contemplate Mary in God's glory. In fact, when she fell asleep in this world to reawaken in Heaven, she simply followed her Son Jesus for the last time, on his longest and most crucial journey, his passage "from this world to the Father" (cf. Jn 13: 1).

Like him, together with him, she departed this world to return "to the Father's House" (cf. Jn 14: 2). And all this is not remote from us as it might seem at first sight, because we are all children of the Father, God; we are all brothers and sisters of Jesus and we are all also children of Mary, our Mother. And we all aspire to happiness. And the happiness to which we all aspire is God, so we are all journeying on toward this happiness we call Heaven which in reality is God. And Mary helps us, she encourages us to ensure that every moment of our life is a step forward on this exodus, on this journey toward God. May she help us in this way to make the reality of heaven, God's greatness, also present in the life of our world. Is this not basically the paschal dynamism of the human being, of every person who wants to become heavenly, perfectly happy, by virtue of Christ's Resurrection? And might this not be the beginning and anticipation of a movement that involves every human being and the entire cosmos? She, from whom God took his flesh and whose soul was pierced by a sword on Calvary, was associated first and uniquely in the mystery of this transformation for which we, also often pierced by the sword of suffering in this world, are all striving.

The new Eve followed the new Adam in suffering, in the Passion, and so too in definitive joy. Christ is the first fruits but his risen flesh is inseparable from that of his earthly Mother, Mary. In Mary all humanity is involved in the Assumption to God, and together with her all creation, whose groans and sufferings, St Paul tells us, are the birth-pangs of the new humanity. Thus are born the new Heaven and the new earth in which death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more (cf. Rv 21: 1-4).

What a great mystery of love is presented to us once again today for our contemplation! Christ triumphed over death with the omnipotence of his love. Love alone is omnipotent. This love impelled Christ to die for us and thus to overcome death. Yes, love alone gives access to the Kingdom of life! And Mary entered after her Son, associated with his Glory, after being associated with his Passion. She entered it with an uncontainable force, keeping the way behind her open to us all. And for this reason we invoke her today as "Gate of Heaven", "Queen of Angels" and "Refuge of sinners". It is certainly not reasoning that will make us understand this reality which is so sublime, but rather simple, forthright faith and the silence of prayer that puts us in touch with the Mystery that infinitely exceeds us. Prayer helps us speak with God and hear how the Lord speaks to our heart.

Let us ask Mary today to make us the gift of her faith, that faith which enables us already to live in the dimension between finite and infinite, that faith which also transforms the sentiment of time and the passing of our existence, that faith in which we are profoundly aware that our life is not

retracted by the past but attracted towards the future, towards God, where Christ, and behind him Mary, has preceded us.

By looking at Mary's Assumption into Heaven we understand better that even though our daily life may be marked by trials and difficulties, it flows like a river to the divine ocean, to the fullness of joy and peace. We understand that our death is not the end but rather the entrance into life that knows no death. Our setting on the horizon of this world is our rising at the dawn of the new world, the dawn of the eternal day.

"Mary, while you accompany us in the toil of our daily living and dying, keep us constantly oriented to the true homeland of bliss. Help us to do as you did".

Dear brothers and sisters, dear friends who are taking part in this celebration this morning, let us pray this prayer to Mary together. In the face of the sad spectacle of all the false joy and at the same time of all the anguished suffering which is spreading through the world, we must learn from her to become ourselves signs of hope and comfort; we must proclaim with our own lives Christ's Resurrection.

"Help us, Mother, bright Gate of Heaven, Mother of Mercy, source through whom came Jesus Christ, our life and our joy. Amen".

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