

‘Where she is, we hope to go’

Apoc 11–12: *a woman, clothed with the sun
the Queen, in gold of Ophir
belong to Him*

Ps 44: *On your right stands
1Cor 15: Christ the first fruits, then those who
Lk 1: 39–56: the Almighty has done great things for me.*

The feasts of Our Lady are very beautiful moments in the Church’s year, I feel — they remind us that our faith has a lovely, feminine dimension. God is the one who acts out of deep love for the world, His people, His bride the Church. Meanwhile, Mary represents the loving, feminine response: first receiving that divine initiative; then responding with her own outpouring of human love for God. She *leads* humanity in that response, and in a motherly way, gently convinces us of it.

But when some non-Catholics hear of our belief in Our Lady’s Assumption into heaven — today’s feast — they often say, “So where does it say that in the bible?” And the answer is, of course: nowhere! But you only need to think of well-known things in your own family — long-standing family stories, well-worn jokes — where are they written down? Answer: nowhere! No need: everyone knows it. In the family of the Church many things were

originally never written down, but were passed down through centuries of tradition. Dogmas are generally only put into writing when there’s a pressure of *disbelief*.

The Assumption of Our Lady into heaven is one such teaching: a belief in the Church from the beginning — from Our Lady’s ‘dormition’ in the 1st century — but only ever put in writing formally in 1950 by Pope Pius XII. We believe that at her death Mary’s body did not decay in a tomb, but was taken to heaven. *We find no grave of hers on earth* — no place is honoured as the tomb of Our Lady — because in fact *she was assumed body and soul into heaven, complete in her human person*. Our bodies lie in graves and decay, and our souls are temporarily cut off from their rightful place with our body until the resurrection of the flesh at the end of time. Not so for Mary. She was sinless; she did not share in the sinfulness that characterizes us, and therefore there was nothing preventing her sharing fully in the resurrection of Christ. Just as He rose with a glorious body, so she partakes in that already, being received bodily into heaven at the close of

her earthly life. You see, Our Lady's Immaculate Conception and her Assumption into heaven are directly linked: Mary's sinless body is not subject to decay — it has no need to; it was already worthy upon her death to be received straight into heaven. Mary gave Christ His earthly flesh; He gave her an immediate share in His risen and heavenly flesh.

Now, it's a pretty good rule, in the Church's liturgy, that if you want to know what a feast is about, you should read the *Preface of the Mass* for that feast. Here's the essence of the Preface for today, as we'll hear it just before the Eucharistic Prayer in a little while:

For today the Virgin Mother of God was assumed into heaven as the beginning and image of Your Church's coming to perfection, and a sign of sure hope and comfort to Your pilgrim people; rightly You would not allow her to see the corruption of the tomb, since from her own body she marvellously brought forth Your incarnate Son, the author of all life.

In thinking about Our Lady's Assumption into heaven — her being taken soul *and body* immediately into heaven at the end of her earthly time — the problem can be that we might almost think of Our Blessed as a 'separate species' ... given her special privileges, she was so different to us,

we imagine, that she is unapproachable by us. She was conceived immaculate — that is, free from the effects of original sin from the very beginning of her life — and at the end of her earthly life she was assumed into heaven — body & soul, without the indignity of bodily decay in a grave. These are things which we do not share in as such ... *But that doesn't make them alien to us.* As the Preface says, Our Lady in her Assumption was to be “*the beginning and image of the Church's coming to perfection.*” All that Mary received is what we are meant to have received. Her sinlessness, and her bodily assumption into heaven are the very sort of joyous blessings that God had intended for the whole of mankind. Imagine a world like that, if man had not sinned at the outset: a world of harmony and perfect union with God in prayer and charity, in which all people at all times would exude love for God and for one another; and then, at the end of that earthly existence be assumed bodily, painlessly, into the utter perfection of heaven. *What Mary is, we were meant to be; where she is, we hope to follow!*

But, despite the Fall of mankind, the ensuing disaster of sin, our being distanced from God, and our consequent unreadiness for heaven — the decay of our mortal bodies — yet God has *not* refused us ultimately that heavenly destiny. It is harder to get to heaven, for we have sinned, and continue to do so, and we obscure what would otherwise be plain to see. However, through the grace of His Son, we can come to the glorious company of heaven, where Our Blessed Lady already reigns as Queen. What she has been given by God — a place in heaven in her full humanity — we can await with real hope: a full sharing in the resurrection of the body. That's why Mary, especially on this feast-day, remains *the sign of sure hope and comfort to God's pilgrim people*. She is our model and our Mother; with her prayers she guides us, her children, gently towards the riches of her Son's kingdom that she knows and enjoys already. We cannot assume automatically to go to heaven; we are not sinless, we are not free of guilt. But from her happy place in heaven Our Blessed Lady wants nothing less than our being there with

her, sharing in the happiness of heaven. She prays for us unceasingly: prays that we do not linger in our sins; that we convert and are reconciled to God, so as to be made as ready as possible at the end of life to be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

When we see Our Lady, the full and perfect human being, enjoying what humanity has been made for — i.e. the bliss and peace of adoring God in heaven — we want to be there with her, don't we? We want our life to make sense, and have that blessed destiny, that gift from God, that Mary already enjoys. Her Assumption into heaven reminds us, and convinces us, that this is what life is about. May she pray for us today, on this blessed feastday, and help keep our hearts set on the life of the world to come.

Our Lady, assumed into heaven — Our Lady, *Queen* of heaven — pray for us! Pray for us to get to heaven! *And Mary said, "... Yes, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation."*