

Assumption of St. Mary the Virgin

Lk 1:46-55

August 14, 2008

Fr. Jeff Richardson

+++

Let me begin by saying that it is indeed a humbling honor to be afforded the opportunity to preach in this holy place and all-the-more on the vigil of this glorious feast of our Blessed Mother that has brought us together in celebration. I thank Fr, Clarke for his invitation; I am most pleased to be here.

It was once said that “now at the end of the summer season, the Church celebrates the most glorious "harvest festival" in the Communion of Saints ~ Mary, the supremely blessed one among women, Mary, the most precious fruit which has ripened in the fields of God's kingdom, is today taken into heaven.

The faithful are drawn here this evening on The Feast of the Assumption to celebrate both the happy departure of Mary from this life by her natural death, and her assumption body and soul into the glory of Heaven.

As Catholics we celebrate the glory of God's work and we experience the joy of Christian hope.

Father Allen pointed out to you, in your monthly newsletter, that not all share the vision glorious, and that sadly some of our Protestant brothers and sisters have rejected the Church's Tradition of the Assumption.

They maintain that it is a doctrine not spelled out in scripture thus it is an “assumption.”

Meaning that it is merely a supposition.

If you would, allow me to play the devil's advocate here for a moment (perhaps that is too strong of an allusion).

But let us say, just for the sake of argument, that it is an assumption.

If so, we would logically have to pose the question, Why would the universal church make such an assumption?

I believe that if we looked at what Holy Scripture does show us about the Mother of our Lord, it is not at all difficult to see why we believe as we do about the Assumption.

With what we are told about the Blessed Virgin Mary, it doesn't make for much of a stretch.

As I am sure you are aware, throughout history the faithful have struggled to understand and bring into balance, harmony and integration, the divine and the human dimensions of Mary's Son.

Repeatedly, there has been an overemphasis of one side or the other.

One area of the vast Christian community was seeing more clearly one aspect, while the other saw the complimentary aspect.

In this, as in all else, Mary has been like her Son.

We have difficulty bringing into balance, harmony, and integration the facets of God's greatest creature, the human person most like unto himself, the Father's first daughter, the Son's mother and the most worthy temple of the Holy Spirit.

While we in the Catholic community seek to do all we can to emphasize the transcendent greatness of this peerless

woman, we must always be vigilant not to over sentimentalize or romanticize our approach to the Holy Mother.

To do so would sell her far short of her preeminent dignity and exalted blessedness.

A clear perception of all that Mary is; the Mother of God and Joseph's wife, a virgin and yet a mother, a courageous widow, a woman of her people and a first among the disciples, provides us with a beginning point.

A clear perception of her completeness can only reflect the divine, the light of Christ and the mercy of the Almighty.

A clear perception of her integral wholeness can call us to a new understanding of what it means to be fully human.

If we allow ourselves a fuller understanding of who Mary is, our hearts and minds are opened to what Mary's Son, the Redeemer, is working out through grace.

Christ is working out through Her and through us a new creation.

Our Lord is calling us to oneness with Him and each other into a participation in a divinely transformed world.

This is what Mary demonstrates for us.

For what it is to be in all of us, already is in her.

This is the meaning of the glorious mystery of the Assumption.

A faithful woman from a backwater town, one from the bottom of society, a poor widowed woman of a subjugated and oppressed people, is lifted up beyond all the greatest and holiest.

Because He who is mighty has done great things for her.

To understand her, is to better understand ourselves and each other and what it means to be called by God.

Called by God to be human and to be divinized, to be a pilgrim on this earth and to be a destined heir of a heavenly throne.

Mary calls us back to the basic truths of faith and the simple practices that respond to these truths.

Mary reminds us of the dispositions that are necessary to receive the Word of God and to enter into His kingdom.

She is a faithful and obedient servant.

Mary is one of us, yet different from us, in that she was ordained to be the Mother of God.

In her we encounter a woman who remains ever close, warm and motherly.

In her we encounter a woman that exudes a power and presence that engenders faith and hope.

The Gospel reading appointed for this, her day, is the Magnificat, her beautiful and supremely powerful hymn.

Never has there been a stronger call for freedom, the freedom that God offers us through His Son.

Mary was able to receive that freedom, its inner meaning and its true cause.

The Magnificat sums up all the salvation history of her people.  
It proclaims the way of the new covenant.

It proclaims her own powerful experience of God.

In the Blessed Virgin we find the power of the Almighty and the obedience of one under God's authority.

Her words are words of both strength and courage and words of obedience and humility.

Mary is the embodiment of the persons we are to be as Christians.

She challenges us to open ourselves to God's freedom and know what it is to be fully human by allowing God's might to make us holy.

Mary challenges us to walk in her way; she told us at the wedding feast in Cana; Do whatever He tells you.

She challenges us to a selflessness that seeks nothing but that our lives should magnify the Lord.

Mary, the one who hears the Word of God and keeps it, remains the universal mother who is able to be completely and significantly with us here and now.

The woman revealed by the Scriptures and the Tradition, gives warmth to that revelation by her continuing presence.

She is as much a mother to us as she was to the beloved disciple when her Son said "Behold your son."

Our Lord says to each one of us: Behold your mother.

She reigns now as the Queen of heaven, but our Holy Mother is, as always, faithful and obedient still radiating a power and presence that engenders faith and hope.

At the throne of God in the presence of her Son she sings out again: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, if I have been privileged and have a glory beyond compare among His servants, it is Because He who is mighty has done great things for me.

Holy is His name.

If the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven is an assumption, it is like unto the assumption that the sun will rise in the morning.

+ + +

*Fr. Richardson is vicar of St. Alban's and St. Stephen's parishes*