



The Holy Spirit Province NEWSLETTER

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ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Children, don't try this at home! A boy named Daniel went to his mother demanding a new bicycle for Christmas. 'Danny, we can't afford it,' she said, 'so write a letter to Jesus and pray for one instead.' 'Dear Jesus,' he wrote, 'I've been a good boy this year and would appreciate a new bicycle. Your friend, Danny.' Now Danny guessed that Jesus knew for sure that he was a brat. So, he gave the letter another try: 'Dear Jesus, I've been an OK boy this year and I want a new bicycle. Yours truly, Daniel.' Danny knew that this wasn't true either. So, he tore it up and tried again: 'Dear Jesus, I've thought about being a good boy. So, may I have a new bicycle? Daniel.' Finally, Danny thought better of making these false claims and so ran to the church nearby. He went inside and stole a small statue of Mary and ran out the door. He went home, hid it under his bed and wrote this letter: 'Jesus, let's face it! I've broken most of the Commandments; I tore up my sister's doll and lots more. I'm desperate. I've got your mother, Mary. If you ever want to see her again, give me a bike for Christmas. You know who.'

That funny story has a serious side to it for our feast of the Assumption of Our Lady today. Over time many people have twisted her memory to fit in with how they think women should behave. So, they have presented her as meek and mild, weak, passive, and submissive. The problem with that is this. It contradicts every one of the ten stories we have of the Mother of Jesus in the New Testament.

We are in debt to St Luke for his gospel portrait today of the visit of Mary to her cousin, Elizabeth. The portrait is unfinished, but it is so straightforward, true, and beautiful that in our 'Hail Mary' prayer we echo Elizabeth's blessing: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.' We honour Mary as the young woman, probably no more than fourteen years old at the time, who put her whole life and self at the service of God's plan, and who let the Holy Spirit empower her to become the Mother of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Luke presents her as both surprised and afraid of what God is asking of her. But she does not let her surprise and fear stop her from saying 'yes' to God's proposal. In picturing her saying 'yes' to God, Luke is saying that she is living up to the standard which her adult Son will teach, that to be a follower of Jesus we must hear the word of God and live it in our lifestyles!

The belief in her Assumption has its origin in the shared faith of the Christian people going back many, many centuries. Christians simply could not believe that after her

exceptionally good and holy life, that Mary's body fell into decay when she died. She was too close to her Son Jesus for that to happen. So, they became convinced that just as God had raised Jesus from the dead, so God raised his Mother too. They saw her also as present with God, present as a complete person, present with body and soul intact, and enjoying the fullness of everlasting life.

That shared belief of the whole ancient Church was proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1950 as a truth revealed by God. But in both the East and the West it had been strongly believed for many centuries before. The belief points ahead to what God will do for us. We believe and we trust that our whole person - body, mind, heart, and spirit - will be raised to a new existence in the presence, peace, and happiness of God.

But Mary gives us hope not just for the afterlife, but for the challenges and struggles of this life too - the challenges and struggles of every day. Luke pictures her as the one who praised God because 'the Almighty has done great things for me'. She goes on to express the hopes and aspirations of needy human beings like us when she sings: 'He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away.'

For many people in need, the song of Mary expresses their hopes too in the power and love of God, to set them free from all that is bad, evil, and ugly, and give them a new life. Mary for them is not alive in statues and pictures but in the changes that take place when the liberating and transforming love of God triumphs over every kind of evil. She is the mother of all oppressed, overlooked, scorned, abused, or neglected persons. She expresses God's opposition to tyranny and God's determination to put down the powerful and ruthless who ignore, despise, or brutalize God's people.

Mary, then, is no weak, silent, passive woman. It comes as no surprise therefore that poor, suffering people keep looking to her for inspiration and help. We see them on our television screens carrying her statue with dignity and pride, arm in arm they walk around army headquarters, palaces, parliaments, and prisons.

Encouraged and supported by Mary, they keep speaking the truth to power. They keep believing in a higher power, a power outside themselves and greater than themselves, a power that we may be inclined to forget. They keep believing that the woman we celebrate today, Mary, is a strong but gentle mother, who makes their hopes for the world her own, and their prayers for the world her prayers too.

So together, with immense trust in her goodness and in her power to change situations and change people, let us pray to her on her Feast, for both ourselves and others in need: - 'Hail Mary ... Amen.'

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