

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
(1 Corinthians 15:20-26 / Luke 1:39-56)  
15.08.2015

Today's celebration of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary speaks to us not only of Mary's glorification, but of the promise of our own glorification in Christ.

Just as this feast has us think of Mary having been led already to share fully in the risen life of her Son, Jesus, so it should make us think of our own call to live lives risen with Christ.

Jesus ascended into heaven to prepare a place for all of us with Him in the Father's presence.

On the morning of the resurrection He spoke of going to His Father and our Father, His God and our God. Where Christ now lives and reigns we are called to live and reign with Him.

The call addressed to us is a call to share in His glory.

As we celebrate Mary's having been honoured by what the definition of the Assumption refers to as *a unique gift of divine grace* it is striking to read the words in the gospel text chosen for today's feast.

In Mary's Song we hear her magnify the Lord. She rejoices in and glorifies her Saviour.

In so doing, Mary speaks of herself in this way: as God's lowly handmaid, His humble servant, as one who has been lifted up by the gracious mercy of our God.

Mary's glorification, like that of her Son, Jesus, is to be understood as the fruit of her having taken the same path that Christ followed: a way of humility, displayed in self-emptying love, a way of *kenosis*.

This is the logic of that famous Christological hymn found in Philippians chapter 2. The way Christ took is the way we are all called to follow.

In chapter 7 of his Rule for Monks, the chapter *On Humility*, St Benedict reminds us that the way of ascent with Christ is arrived at through willingly taking the way of descent He has taken before us. It is those who humble themselves who shall be exalted.

The Assumption is best understood as the accomplishment, the natural outcome, the crowning of Mary's having humbled herself.

I would want to stress today that this mystery of Mary's Assumption does not estrange or distance Mary from us, as some might think at first view.

No!

I contend that Mary's elevation, like the glorification of her Son, Jesus, actually draws her all the closer to us, or rather draws us all the closer to her, in our hopes and aspirations.

Just as Jesus left this world saying, as He was lifted up: *I am with you always*, so Mary, who is now with Christ in glory, rests close to us in the communion of the Church: a communion we experience in a privileged way through prayer.

As I have already said, it is surely significant that the gospel text chosen for today is the *Magnificat*.

In this hymn Mary speaks of herself as a poor one filled with good things, a humble soul who has been exalted: she rejoices not in her own glory, but in that of her Lord. She declares: *My soul glorifies the Lord*.

It is the Lord who is magnified, made great, by Mary's song.

Her song is not one of self-praise.

Mary's prayer, the *Magnificat*, is one the Church encourages us to sing day after day.

The challenge is to sing it as St Benedict says we should sing the words of the psalms: *with mind and heart in accord with the words we pronounce with our lips*.

To quote Mgr Perrier, the former bishop of Lourdes: *Mary gives thanks: Magnificat! She glorifies the Lord in her song, a song which is really a tapestry of Old Testament Scripture verses, but which is also a prophetic proclamation of the paschal mystery, for who more than the Risen Lord Himself is the poor one filled with good things, the One who was humbled and is now exalted?*

The notion of prophecy introduced there helps widen the significance of Mary's Assumption. It makes of it more than just a personal privilege. It gives it a wider ecclesial significance.

The community and social dimension to Mary's *Magnificat* helps us see that there are wider implications to the mystery we celebrate today than just some honour conferred upon her person. Mary sings of and gives thanks for things God has accomplished in the life of all His Chosen People and not just in her life alone.

The *Magnificat* is a celebration of God's action in favour of all the children of Israel.

Likewise, our celebration of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary should be seen as having wider implications. What we celebrate today is not just an affair of personal privilege for Mary. It is more than that.

What has happened already for Mary will happen for all of us when the day comes for us to be raised to share in Christ's glory. We too shall be lifted up, glorified with Christ.

The way Mary (the first Christian disciple) has taken is the way we are all called to follow.

I understand Mary's prayer recorded for us in today's gospel passage as inviting us to do as she did. I understand it as inviting us to move beyond concentrating on Mary and/or on ourselves alone. Without denying that Mary sings of what the Lord has done for her personally, it is clear that in the *Magnificat* she sings of much more than her personal blessings.

Mary's Song broadens her vision somewhat and it should have the same effect upon us. Our reading of the *Magnificat* on this feast should broaden our vision somewhat.

Put simply - and this is where Mary's knowledge of the Scriptures and God's ways of dealing with His people Israel come in - the words of Mary's Song show us that she (the lowly servant girl of Nazareth) realised that there was much more going on for her in life than simply the joy that went with having been told that she would soon be a mum.

Mary's formulations in the *Magnificat* show us that she saw the wider social/community implications of the Christ event in her life.

Mary's having a Son was a gift to the whole of God's People - not only of her own time, but of all generations, including our own.

She sings: *God has shown mercy from age to age, from one generation to the next. In our day as much as in the past. He has scattered the proud of heart. He has brought down the powerful. He has lifted up the lowly and He has filled the hungry with good things.*

I once heard someone say of the *Magnificat*: *This is big stuff, affecting the world at large - not just a bit of domestic rejoicing.*

In her *Magnificat*, Mary spells out what the birth of her Son will mean.

As we read today's gospel text we note that Mary does not speak in terms of God *will* do this, but in terms of His having done it!

She uses the past and not the present tense.

We might protest: But it has not all happened yet!

We need to understand the significance of Mary's speaking in the past tense as she did. This is a way of speaking often used in ancient literature, especially in the Sacred Scriptures, to convey a sense of certainty that what is proclaimed will happen.

The point to grasp is that Mary understood, in some way, that the One whom she bore in her womb was not her child alone, *but the child given to us, the Son born for us*, as Isaiah had foretold. Mary somehow knew that the infant she carried in her womb was the Son of God the Most High and with His coming into our world a whole new world order would begin. Mary dared to believe, even as she carried Jesus in her womb, that a new world order was already emerging.

We share that belief.

That being said, we also know that not everything has changed. We are still awaiting the fullness of redemption. Indeed, we are acutely aware that our world is really struggling in so many ways to arrive at the fulfilment of the promises made to us - such as an end of oppression, hunger, injustice etc.

The kingdom of the prophets' vision and Mary's Song, the kingdom of Jesus' own preaching, while it has been inaugurated, is yet to come in all its fullness.

Jesus has come into this world and He has done what was needed to bring about God's kingdom in our midst, but we still await its full realisation and to begin with in our own lives!

In a way, the issue of the coming of the kingdom now befalls us.

We are responsible for it, we have a responsibility to bring it about - or rather to allow it to come about within us.

Those words *responsible* and *responsibility* stem from the root word *response*.

This is precisely what is needed for the coming of God's kingdom and its full realisation on earth: our response!

Just as the Lord found an integral response in Mary at the Annunciation, when she said wholeheartedly *let it be done to me according to your word*, so the Lord awaits from each one of us wholehearted consent to His will, a total *yes*, today.

It is to the extent that we proffer a total response to God in our lives that His kingdom comes about within us.

I hear today's gospel passage as challenging us in this respect and I understand this feast as reinforcing that challenge.

Yes, the gospel song, the *Magnificat*, and the mystery of Mary's Glorious Assumption into heaven, both challenge us to allow God to be God in the whole of our life, in every domain of our being. This gospel word and this Marian feast both encourage us to allow God to be with us, *Emmanuel*. Moreover, they challenge us to decide to want to be more with God, to enter into an ever deeper relationship of intimacy with Christ and to enjoy God's love more extensively, to the point where we can say, as Paul did: *I live no longer I alone, but Christ lives in me*.

May we all be able to say one day that we are *one with Christ in glory!*

And since Mary is a model of what the Church is called to be, may all God's People be able to say: *we are one in Christ*, for, in the logic of Christ's own prayer in John 17, it is in this way that we give glory to the Father, by being *one in Christ*.

Amen!