

8/14/2005

THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

Today the Church celebrates the fulfillment of the life and ministry of our Lord's mother. This fulfillment occurred as she passed beyond the confines of this space/time system in which we still dwell and entered, her body and soul intact, into heaven, where we hope one day to be. Today is a happy feast of hope and help for us all.

But it is a particularly wonderful day for one of us here, little Jeffrey Kelley, for on this day he, after months of preparation, will be admitted to the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Lady's Son. We might not be wrong if we were to think that perhaps God appointed this feast as the day for Jeffrey's First Communion. For, you see, six years ago, Jeffrey was baptized on the feast of our Lady's Assumption. This convergence was completely inadvertent, for at that time his family swam in another stream of God's Church and, thus, were unaware of the significance of this day in the wider Church.

Think of it: On this feast, six years ago, Jeffrey became a Christian, a son of God the Father, a brother of Jesus. His hope then became what this feast celebrates: his own ultimate assumption into heaven, body and soul intact, forever to enjoy and glorify God. Now, six years later on this feast, Jeffrey begins to receive the powerful conduit of that grace which he needs for this hope to be realized: that conduit which is nothing other, and nothing less, than the very Body and Blood of the Son of Mary. What a happy convergence!

And what a blessed assurance for us all: right now, in the eternal glory into which we are striving eventually to come, our Lady is leading the saints in their prayers on behalf of Jeffrey and you and me.

On our behalf. Mary's life and ministry, both earthly and now heavenly, has always been **on our behalf**. Consider:

- For us and for our salvation, Mary said "Yes" to God's desire, and our need, that he come to us, so that we might come to him.
- For us and for our salvation, Mary gave her body and soul to God, that he might become human like us, so that we might become holy like him.
- For us and for our salvation, Mary spent her life raising her Son into the Man who could say "Yes" to his Father's will for him, as she herself had done.
- For us and for our salvation, Mary, a widow, affirmed her Son's leaving her to go out and fulfill his mission of salvation.
- For us and for our salvation, Mary stood next to her Son at his execution, supporting him, encouraging him to remain faithful to his mission.
- For us and for our salvation, Mary then mothered his disciples, even those who had abandoned him in his time of need, until finally he called her home.
- And now, from heaven, for us and for our salvation, Mary reaches out to us, as at our shrine we see her reaching out with Jesus in her arms, saying, "Receive my Son into yourself, as did I. And as heaven filled me through him and I thereby became part of heaven, so heaven will fill you and you will have part in heaven. Then give him away to others through yourself, as did I, and the petition he taught you and me to pray of the Father will be realized: it shall be on earth, in however small a way, as it is in heaven."

All this of our Lady, for us and for our salvation. And through Mary we discover the way of salvation for us. It is the way of saying “Yes” to God in the daily events of our lives. This way means that we risk trusting that God is **with** us and **for** us in these events, even when their circumstances seem otherwise. In that trust we then try to be faithful to him, incarnating in our lives as best we can that holiness of life and outgoing love for others that we find in him.

This is precisely what our Lady did, and had to do, every day of her life. It was not one “Yes” for all time that Mary had to give, but one “yes” after another, one day after another. And often enough, her prior “yes” was succeeded by events which begged the question of whether or not she should say “yes” again.

Recall some of the consequences to Mary of her “yes-es”:

- danger to her life in a culture little tolerant of pregnancy out of wedlock;
- a hazardous birth, in unclean conditions, midwifed by a husband, who, like many men then and now, perhaps knew nothing about birthing babies;
- life as a refugee in an alien land, to which she and her husband fled in order to save her Son from early slaughter;
- dependence for support upon the mercy of her wider family when her only child left her, now a widow, to be about his mission;
- ridicule and ostracism when their village concluded her Son was “too much”;
- and finally, the assault upon her heart and soul, when she had to stand at the foot of a cross upon which her Son hung and encourage him to trust on still, in spite of it all.

The power and the glory of Mary’s life of risking trust in God’s goodness, in spite of evidence to the contrary, seems shown in this fact: **After** that cross, we do not find Mary, drawn into her pain, wailing and disconsolate. No. We find Mary gathering to herself those who had deserted him, praying for them, praying with them, and leading them in waiting patiently for that gift he had promised them all: the Holy Spirit.

Daily our Lady was asked by God to say “yes” to him, to trust that he **was** in her life, working **for** her good. Daily he asks this of you and me. This is a “yes” which we must speak not with our lips, but with our lives, lived in obedience to God and following in his ways, regardless of circumstances and cost.

And, really, it is not as hard as it may sound for us to do this. Why? Because, like Mary, none of us are asked to give one “yes” to God to cover a lifetime. Rather, as he asked our Lady, so God asks us: to give him only one “yes” at a time, a “yes” to trust him just for **this** moment. That is all: our “yes” is not for *up ahead*, but only for *now*, for *now* is the only moment God gives us.

Years ago, I heard of how a young woman learned this lesson from her mother after they were informed of her sister’s brain tumor. It could not be removed and there were hard times ahead. “She may have to be institutionalized,” said the doctors, “she may become violent.”

At this news, the young woman fell apart. Her mother sat her down and said, “Now, you look, girl, you’re all upset about something that hasn’t happened and may never happen. You cannot live tomorrow’s crosses on today’s graces. We have the help we need to get through today ... **today**.”

Whatever God may allow in the future, he will give us the help we need at that time.”

Now **that**, dear ones, is the way of saying “yes” to God one moment at a time, one day at a time. This was the way our Lady received heaven *into* herself, this was the way our Lady gave heaven to us *through* herself. And this was the way Mary was brought into heaven itself when she completed in her earthly pilgrimage all that the Father desired from her for us and for our salvation.

Now, as you know, pilgrimages are made from all over the world to the shrines where rest the mortal remains of the great foundation stones of the Church, the heroes and heroines of our family. It is reasonable to expect that surely somewhere – at Jerusalem, perhaps, or at Ephesus, where Mary went with the apostle John following her Son’s ascension – we should be privileged to go to venerate the mortal remains of her through whom salvation came to us.

But God disposed it otherwise. Jewish tradition records that when Jerusalem was destroyed by the armies of Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah took the ark of God away from the city, and buried it in some secret cleft of rock. You will remember that the ark was the most sacred object for our Jewish forebears, for it contained objects which signified God’s presence among them and their belonging to him: manna, that bread with which he had fed them during their long sojourn in the desert; the staff of their first high priest, Aaron; and the tablets of God’s covenant with them. Once hidden by Jeremiah, this ark was never seen again, except ... except by John, in his vision on the isle of Patmos, where he saw the ark of God, **in heaven**. Listen to his account from today’s second reading:

Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars...”

Do you get it? The true Ark of God is our Lady, that virgin body and soul in which was conceived, nestled, nurtured, and given to the world **Jesus**, who is the True Bread of Heaven, the One and Only High Priest of the Father, and the very covenant of the Father’s love and law .

When and where our Lady passed out of this world, and in what manner, no one can tell us for certain. **But we know where she is**. She, who never abandoned her Son in his earthly life and death nor his Church following his return to glory, he would not abandon at her death. Loving Son and Lord that he is, he brought her home to him in heaven, where she could continue in joy that labor she had begun when first she said “yes” to his Father, for us and for our salvation.

The transformation of our material bodies to which you and I look forward one day has been accomplished in Mary. And the way it was accomplished in her is the way for us, her sons and daughters: the way of saying “yes” to God, moment by moment, day by day. And should you need encouragement and help in doing this, as surely each of us do, you have someone to go to, as did our Lord: her name is Mary, beloved of God, our path, our light, our mother.