THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

MARY AS THE MODEL OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE

INTRODUCTION

Beloved sisters and brothers, we gather to celebrate with the highest solemnity, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this great feast, God not only crowned the virtues of our Lady in her glorious assumption but strengthens our hope for eternal life and final resurrection of the just.

Pope Pius XII solemnly defined the dogma of the Assumption on November 1, 1950, in *Munificentissimus Deus (*The Most Bountiful God), teaching that the Immaculate Virgin Mary, at the completion of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

The theme of Mary as the model for our Christian life is surely fitting because we learn from our Lady the important virtue of total consecration to God. Through the Blessed Mother, God gives us a beautiful example of what a life fully surrendered to Him looks like. Her faith, humility, obedience, trust, and willingness to say “yes” to God makes her not only someone for us to admire, but someone whose virtues we are called to emulate in our own lives.

The Assumption of the BVM is a sign of hope and the fulfillment of a life completely given to God. Mary points us towards our own ultimate destiny (1 Cor. 15:28, Phil 3:19-20), and reminds us of the promise of resurrection and eternal life with God.

In our own Christian journey, while we work hard to be successful in life, family, relationships and career and more importantly in our journey of faith, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary beautifully aligns with the ideas of spiritual models to look up to, mentorship, and how we can find in Mary the perfect examples of holiness to follow while discerning God’s call in our lives.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrates Mary’s entering into heaven body and soul. For us, this feast is a sign of hope. It shows that God values our physical bodies and promises us eternal life (Jn 17:3, Acts 16:31). Mary's whole life shows us how to trust God and say yes to His plan. God saves all of us. Our physical lives matter to Him. In our Lady, we learn how to listen to God in prayers and act with courage. We are called too to emulate this brave faith today. Since our Mother Mary is already with God in heaven,she points the way for us. Hence, to live out the feast of Assumption with lively, active and passionate faith: We all must return to God the fountain of holiness. We must all return to the sacraments with the radical commitments that characterized the life of the Saints. We are all enjoined to take time each day to pray the holy rosary and hear God's voice; help people in need just like Mary helped her cousin Elizabeth; then stay close to the Church by being active parishioners for spiritual companionship and growth in holiness.

THE DORMITION OF MARY BY THE EASTERN TRADITION

From the Gospel account of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ in St John (Jn 19:25-27), Standing by the foot of the cross of Jesus were His mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved, he said to His mother, "Woman, behold your Son". Then He said to his disciple, "Behold your mother". And form that moment, the disciple took Mary into his home.

Christian tradition and Church history held that John the beloved Apostle and the blessed Virgin Mary lived in Ephesus till when she passed away about 15years after the death of Jesus Christ (A.D. 48). The John sent for the rest Apostles who were still alive. When they gathered after about 4 days, he took them up to the room where the body of Mary was laid.

When they entered the room, an amazing miracle took place: the body was no more! The room was rather filled with sweet scenting smoke of incense. They all gave glory to God as they recalled the beautiful prayers of the psalm in Ps. 16:10- for you will not leave my soul among the dead, nor let your beloved know decay. Indeed, like incense rises up to God, so was the total dedication of Mary (Rev. 8:3-4).

The Church Fathers employed the term Dormition referring to falling asleep (1 Thess. 4:13-18) in describing the mysteries of the Assumption.

FEW EXCERPTS FROM POPE PIUS XII'S MUNIFICENTISSIMUS DEUS (THE MOST BOUNTIFUL GOD)

APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION OF **POPE PIUS XII *MUNIFICENTISSIMUS DEUS***

DEFINING THE DOGMA OF THE ASSUMPTION- *November 1, 1950* (www.vatican.va)

1. The most bountiful God, who is almighty, the plan of whose providence rests upon wisdom and love, tempers, in the secret purpose of his own mind, the sorrows of peoples and of individual men and women by means of joys that he interposes in their lives from time to time, in such a way that, under different conditions and in different ways, all things may work together unto good for those who love him (Rom 8:28) (MD #1).

2.After we have poured forth prayers of supplication again and again to God, and have invoked the light of the Spirit of Truth, for the glory of Almighty God who has lavished his special affection upon the Virgin Mary, for the honor of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages and the Victor over sin and death, for the increase of the glory of that same august Mother, and for the joy and exultation of the entire Church; by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. (MD #44)

3. The Holy Father went on to cite Suarez, In Tertiam Partem, (D. Thomae, q. 27, a. 2, disp. 3, sec. 5, n. 31).

At the same time the great Suarez was professing in the field of Mariology the norm that "keeping in mind the standards of propriety, and when there is no contradiction or repugnance on the part of Scripture, the mysteries of grace which God has wrought in the Virgin must be measured, not by the ordinary laws, but by the divine omnipotence." Supported by the common faith of the entire Church on the subject of the mystery of the Assumption, he could conclude that this mystery was to be believed with the same firmness of assent as that given to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin.

4. Among the holy writers who at that time employed statements and various images and analogies of Sacred Scripture to illustrate and to confirm the doctrine of the Assumption, which was piously believed, the Evangelical Doctor, St. Anthony of Padua, holds a special place. On the feast day of the Assumption, while explaining the prophet's words: "I will glorify the place of my feet," he stated it as certain that the divine Redeemer had bedecked with supreme glory his most beloved Mother from whom he had received human flesh. He asserts that "you have here a clear statement that the Blessed Virgin has been assumed in her body, where was the place of the Lord's feet. Hence it is that the holy Psalmist writes: 'Arise, O Lord, into your resting place: you and the ark which you have sanctified.'" And he asserts that, just as Jesus Christ has risen from the death over which he triumphed and has ascended to the right hand of the Father, so likewise the ark of his sanctification "has risen up, since on this day the Virgin Mother has been taken up to her heavenly dwelling." (St Anthony of Padua, Sermones Dominicales et in Solemnitatibus, In Assumptione Sancta Mariae Virginis Sermo.)

5. At the center of the Assumption is the earlier definition (1854- By Pope Pius IX- on the Immaculate Conception) Ineffabilis Deus- (The indescribable God)

Wherefore, in humility and fasting, we unceasingly offered our private prayers as well as the public prayers of the Church to God the Father through his Son, that he would deign to direct and strengthen our mind by the power of the Holy Spirit. In like manner did we implore the help of the entire heavenly host as we ardently invoked the Paraclete. Accordingly, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for the honor of the Holy and undivided Trinity, for the glory and adornment of the Virgin Mother of God, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith, and for the furtherance of the Catholic religion, by the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own: “We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful. (ID #29)

According to Richard McBrien’s Catholicism on the theme of Mary, two lovely quotes will help bring home our reflection, ‘In a papal bull of December 8, 1854, entitled Ineffabilis Deus (Ineffable

God), Pius IX solemnly decreed that "The Most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by the singular grace and privilege of Almighty God and in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin, that this is revealed by God and, therefore, firmly and constantly to be believed by all the faithful. (Ibid, p.1092)

Continuing, Mc Brien added another footnote on Pius XII's Munificentissimus Deus (1950) that according to the teaching of the pope, the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven was her crowning glory to be preserved from the corruption of the tomb (Ps 16:10). And like her Son before her, Mary joined Jesus to conquer death and to be raised body and soul to the glory of heaven, to shine refulgently as Queen at the right hand of her Son, the Immortal King of Ages" (Ps 45:14).

The assumption had a theological fitness to the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. It was fitting that the physical body that bore and nourished Jesus should share immediately in Christ's victory over sin and death

THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The CCC beautifully summarizes the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the following way (#965-966):

After her Son's Ascension, Mary aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers (Acts 1:12-14). In her association with the Apostles and several women, we also see Mary by her prayers imploring the gift of the Holy Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation.

Finally, the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted fully conformed to her Son (Ezk 44:2), the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary therefore is a singular participation in her Son's resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians.

For the Byzantine Liturgical feast of the Dormition (Falling Asleep) (1 Thess. 4:13-18), the Eastern Church echoes: 'In giving birth, you kept your virginity; in your Dormition you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were joined to the source of Life. You conceived the Living God, and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death.

SCRIPTURE TEXTS:

There are various scriptural allusions that buttresses the Church's faith in the Assumption:

1) Gen. 3:15-16- Then the Lord God said to the serpent, 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel'.

2) Ps. 16:10- For you will not leave my soul among the dead; nor let your beloved know decay.
3) Ezk. 44:2- The Lord said to prophet Ezekiel; This gate must remain closed; it must not be opened, and no one should come through it. Because the Lord God of Israel came through it, it must remain closed.
4) Lk 1:28- Then the Angel Gabriel told Mary, 'Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.
5) Lk 1:26-38- The Full text of the Annunciation is even more profound: Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. You will conceive and bear a Son whom you will name Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.
6) Lk 1:38- Then Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word'.
7) Rom 12:1-2: I urge you therefore, beloved brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to the pattern of this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.
8) Ps 45- Many of the Church Fathers saw the Royal Wedding of Psalm 45 as a typology of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Church, the bride of Christ. In Ps 45:10, the psalmist sang concerning the wedding, the daughters of kings are among your bride, a princess arrayed in pearls set in gold, who take their seat at your righthand. Ps 45:14- On your right stands the queen in the golden pearl.
9) 1 Cor 15:20- Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruit of all those who have fallen asleep. 1 Cor 15:26- The last of the enemies to be destroyed is death. 1 Cor 15:28- When everything is subjected to Him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all. 1 Cor 15:54- When that which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility, and that which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word is fulfilled which says, death is swallowed up in victory.
10) Rev 12:1- A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. Rev 19:5,7- A voice coming from the throne of God exclaims, "Alleluia! The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready".
11) Rev 21:5- The one who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new!'.

CONCLUSION

From the beautiful theme of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother, we have a lot of lessons that will encourage our journey of faith and resilient call to discipleship:

1) Total dedication (Rom 12:1-2)
2) The challenge of her virginity is a model for purity of life (Pauline Tradition 1 Cor 6:12-20, Rom 6:3-14)

3) Mary's faith, humility, obedience, and the great YES! (Lk 1:26-38, 37)
4) Mentorship
5) Call to holiness (Matt. 5:48)
6) Heaven is our ultimate reward of virtue (Phil 3:19-20)

The Assumption is indeed a sign of hope and the fulfillment of a life completely given to God in consecration like Mary's. Mary points us toward our own ultimate destiny and reminds us of the promise of resurrection and eternal life with God. It beautifully aligns with the ideas regarding models to look up to, mentorship, and how all of us can find examples of holiness to follow while discerning God's call in our own lives.

Let us join the whole heaven and earth to sing joyfully, 'Hail Holy queen enthroned above, oh Maria! Hail Mother of mercy and of love, oh Maria. Triumph all ye cherubim. Sing with us ye Seraphim. Heaven and earth resound our hymn. Slave, salve, salve Regina'.

Peace be with you.

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