

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary August 15

On November 1, 1950, Pius XII defined the Assumption of Mary to be a dogma of faith: "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 to heavenly glory." The pope proclaimed this dogma only after a broad consultation of bishops, theologians and laity. There were few dissenting voices. What the pope solemnly declared was already a common belief in the Catholic Church.

We find homilies on the Assumption going back to the sixth century. In following centuries the Eastern Churches held steadily to the doctrine, but some authors in the West were hesitant. However, by the 13th century there was universal agreement. The feast was celebrated under various names (Commemoration, Dormition, Passing, Assumption) from at least the fifth or sixth century. Today it is celebrated as a solemnity.

Scripture does not give an account of Mary's Assumption into heaven. Nevertheless, Revelation 12 speaks of a woman who is caught up in the battle between good and evil. Many see this woman as God's people. Since Mary best embodies the people of both Old and New Testament, her Assumption can be seen as an exemplification of the woman's victory. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:20 Paul speaks of Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Since Mary is closely associated with all the mysteries of Jesus' life, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit has led the Church to belief in Mary's share in his glorification. So close was she to Jesus on earth, she must be with him body and soul in heaven.

Reflection: In the light of the Assumption of Mary, it is easy to pray her Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) with new meaning. In her glory she proclaims the greatness of the Lord and finds joy in God her Savior. God has done marvels to her and she leads others to recognize God's holiness. She is the lowly handmaid who deeply revered her God and has been raised to the heights. From her position of strength she will help the lowly and the poor find justice on earth, and she will challenge the rich and powerful to distrust wealth and power as a source of happiness. The more we pray the classic prayers treasured by Christians over the centuries, the more we discover new truths, new shades of meaning. In the 'Hail Holy Queen' we say that human life here on earth is 'our exile'. We are not at home in this world. There is another place where righteousness is at home. While we walk across the desert, Mary is a place of safety given to all who believe in her son. She is a refuge to all who need shelter. And after our pilgrimage of sorrow and joy is over, we are promised a place of glory and light, in the safe place where we no longer need Mary's prayers, the place where God is all in all, and Christ reigns. On his right stands the Queen in garments of gold. Until then we rejoice that the full of grace can obtain the graces we need, whether we ask her help or not. Vatican II's constitution on the Church, 68 states, "In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Mother of Jesus continues in this present world as the image and first flowering of the Church as she is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise, Mary shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come (cf. 2 Peter 3:10), as a sign of certain hope and comfort for the pilgrim People of God." Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we, like you, may be made worthy of the promise of Christ.