

Feast of the Assumption

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by

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As we celebrate the glorious Assumption of the great mother of God, Mary most holy, we ask her to pray with us and for us. We know from the tradition of our Church and also from our own experiences that Mary is indeed a powerful intercessor who prays for us constantly, always asking God to give us the graces we need to do His will. But she's more than an intercessor for us: she is a realistic example of what it means to live according to God's plan. Today, as we celebrate how God brought her, body and soul, into heaven at the end of her life, the Church reminds us of three things about Mary that can be very helpful to us as we try to live *our* lives according to God's plan.

First, today's proper Gospel reading (Luke 1: 39-56) reminds us that the Blessed Virgin was humble. She put the needs of other people ahead of her own needs. She treated other people as though they were very important. Here, we find her, pregnant, carrying in her womb the Savior of the World, and yet she doesn't sit around expecting people to come and wait on her. Rather, Mary sets out on a journey – a rather difficult journey through hill country – going to visit her cousin Elizabeth to take care of her during *her* pregnancy. Instead of putting herself first, Mary puts Elizabeth first, and in doing so she gives us a practical example of what her Son will later teach in so many ways, that the way to the Kingdom -- the way to the Father, the way to our salvation -- is discovered by serving others, by helping those who need us, by taking care of the vulnerable, by putting other people and their interests above our own concerns.

When we fight our urge to be on top; when we see our coworkers as members of a team and not as competition; when we manage our families through disciplined love and not through physical or emotional threats and manipulation; when we teach with kindness, without a heavy-handed use of the real authority that we have; when we share with those who have less than us, whether we're sharing our resources, our time, or our friendship: whenever we do any of these things, we are putting others first and following the example of Mary.

The second thing the gospel shows us is that Mary treasured the scriptures. Her words at the end of the reading are familiar to all of us: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." It's the beginning of the prayer we call the Magnificat. What might surprise us is that Mary is actually quoting Psalm 35 and the Prophet Isaiah when she pours forth this great hymn of praise. Psalm 35 says "my soul shall rejoice in the LORD," and Isaiah writes "I greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God." Mary knew that one way to be close to God was to treasure the scriptures in her heart, to meditate on them over and over. There's a lesson in there, isn't there? You know, the Bible is the most frequently printed book in the world. There are more copies of the Bible in the world than any other book. Most of us have Bibles in our homes; sadly, many of those Bibles have layers of dust on them. If we want to be close to the Lord, then we have to allow ourselves to be nourished by His Word, the way Mary allowed herself to be nourished. One way to do that is to

become more familiar with the scriptures. Mary knew that; and when it was time for her to express to Elizabeth how wonderful God had been to her, she chose to do so by proclaiming words from the Scriptures. Her example inspires us and urges us to do the same.

The final point comes out in the preface for today's Mass, the prayer we make after our gifts are prepared. In that preface we pray: "You would not allow her to see the corruption of the tomb since from her own body she marvelously brought forth your incarnate Son, the Author of all life." The reason Mary is assumed into heaven is not because of her own merits – even though they are myriad – but because of her relationship to Jesus, because, in the words of the Preface, she has "marvelously brought forth . . . the Author of all life." It's in Christ that all are brought to life, as today's reading from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians reminds us. It's in Christ that Mary receives in this morning's gospel the title "blessed" from her cousin Elizabeth: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." It's in Christ that even Mary's body is preserved for paradise, and it's in Christ that we too look for the resurrection of the body, as we proclaim each Sunday and every feast in our Creed. Mary always points us to her Son, and today as we celebrate her glorious Assumption she invites us once again to place our hope in Him and our trust in His promises.

Let us ask Mary to intercede with God on our behalf, that God might give us the grace of true humility, that we might take to heart the message of His Son about the first being last and the last being first. Let us ask for a hunger for God's word, so that, like Mary, we may become pure of heart and open to His will. And let us ask for an increase in the virtue of trust, that even as we serve as God's hands on this earth we might place ourselves more and more in His hands as we move toward heaven. Then we will have celebrated Mary in the best way, because then our praise will be made up of loving actions and hearts on fire for the Kingdom. That's the best praise we can offer. That's the challenge Mary sets for us today.