

# *The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother of Our Lord*

## *by Father Francis Xavier Weninger, 1876*

Three things are today recalled to our memory: the happy departure of Mary, the mother of Jesus, from this world, her glorious entrance into heaven, and her coronation in heaven. Christ, our Lord, did not take His mother with Him when He ascended to heaven, as He had the power to do, but preferred that she should remain on earth a few more years, to be a consolation and an example of virtue to the Christians. The holy mother passed this time, which, according to the opinion of many, lasted twenty-three years, in great holiness, occupied in prayer, meditation on the heavenly mysteries and joys; in the remembrance of all that her beloved Son had done for thirty-three years for the salvation of mankind, and in instructing and encouraging the Christians. She had the great joy of seeing and hearing how the faith in her Divine Son was spreading everywhere among the Jews and the heathens. Her desire to be called away from earth to be re-united to her Son daily increased. God at length heeded her prayer and sent an Angel to announce to her the day of her departure. O! how rejoiced was the heart of Mary at this message! When the day arrived, on which her soul was to go to heaven, not only those Christians who were related to her, and those who knew her were there, but all the apostles, excepting St. Thomas, who were preaching all over the world, were present.

Mary had requested her Son that they might be there in her last hour. She spoke to all most lovingly, exhorted them to continue in their zeal, assured them of Divine assistance and of her motherly intercession in heaven, and thus bade them farewell. Then Christ Himself, accompanied by numberless holy spirits, appeared to His Blessed Mother, and invited her to enter into the glories of heaven. Mary, filled with an inexpressible joy, repeated the words she had so often uttered: "Be it done unto me according to Thy word;" and then gave her soul into the arms of her Divine Son, in a transport of heavenly love. Her death took place, according to many authentic historians, in the 72nd, or according to others, in the 63rd year of her age. How her loss afflicted the apostles and other Christians, may easily be imagined; but they consoled themselves by her promise to intercede for them and guard them. The glory, with which the soul of the Blessed Virgin was received into heaven, no human tongue can describe, no human understanding comprehend; nor the joy with which she was received, nor the veneration manifested to her by the Saints and other holy spirits.

Meanwhile, nothing was left undone by the apostles and other Christians, necessary for the burial of so pure, so holy a body as that of the Divine Mother. Kissing it most piously, they embalmed it with spices and most precious ointments, while they praised the glory of the Lord. The angels themselves, it is related by some historians, chanted, during this time, a hymn of praise, which was heard by all present. This was continued, St. Juvenalis, bishop of Jerusalem, writes, until the holy body was interred. The apostles and Christians remained at the tomb for three days, incessantly glorifying the Almighty; and several authors of great reputation testify that the Angels continued singing their hymns of praise during all that time, near the body of their Queen.

At the end of the three days, St. Thomas came, and the following event will show that it was providential that he was not there before. Inexpressibly grieved that he had not had the honor of being present at the departure of the soul of the Blessed Virgin, he begged the Apostles to open the tomb, that he might, at least, see and honor her sacred remains. The apostles did so, but found not the body, but only the linen with which it had been covered. They all concluded, enlightened from above, that the soul of the Mother of Jesus, which had, immediately on its departure from this world, gone to heaven, had, by especial divine favor, united itself again with her body, which had been thus received in the Eternal Kingdom. And it is this which is commemorated by the festival of this day.

No Christian can hesitate to believe the assumption of Mary and her reception, in soul and body, into Heaven, if he considers that the Son of God dwelt nine months in her chaste womb. It was surely not meet that her body, which had been unstained by sin, and only used in the service of the Most High, and which had been a dwelling of the Word of God, should decay and become food for worms. The Almighty has preserved the bodies of many of the Saints; who then can suppose that He would allow the body of Mary to corrupt and become dust and ashes? And if the body of the Blessed Virgin were still somewhere upon earth and uncorrupted, it is hardly possible to believe that God would have kept it so long concealed from the knowledge of the church; especially as He has miraculously revealed the resting-place of the bodies of several of His Saints, who were far below the Divine Mother in dignity and holiness. Hence, the belief that the Blessed Mother entered heaven in body and soul, is one which cannot reasonably be doubted by those who profess the Christian faith. It is equally without doubt that the Blessed Virgin was exalted to such glory as no other Saint enjoys ; therefore, it is right to believe that she was crowned Queen of all Saints.

On earth she was not only far beyond the Saints in the exalted position in which the Almighty placed her when He chose her as the mother of His only Son, but she also immeasurably surpassed them in grace, virtue and merit. How, then, can we think otherwise, than that she is raised far above them all in the kingdom of her Son? The just, according to Holy Writ, shall shine like stars in Heaven. How bright, then, must be the light of her, who-surpassed all the just in fidelity and holiness? "If no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor the mind of man hath been able to conceive, what God prepares for all those who love Him," says St. Bernard, "how can we describe what was prepared for her who gave Him birth, and who loved Him above all others?" King Solomon, wishing to honor his mother, made her sit upon a throne at his right hand. How can a Christian doubt that Jesus Christ, who loved His Mother much more than Solomon loved his, would honor her in like manner? No; all the faithful recognize and honor the Divine Mother, raised as high above all the Saints in heaven, as she surpassed them in all things on earth. "The glory of the Blessed Virgin surpasses that of the other Saints," says St. Bernard, "as the light of the sun does that of the stars of heaven."

"Our greatest comfort should be that, as much as Mary is exalted above all the Saints of heaven, so she is far more solicitous about us than they are." These are the words of St. Bonaventure. St. Bernard writes, that Mary, the Blessed Virgin, was taken to heaven, to become our intercessor with her Divine Son. The same is written by other Holy Fathers, as St. Irenaeus, St. Ephrem, St. Anselm, St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. John of Damascus, who all confer upon the holy Mother the title of Intercessor, and hence beg her intercession. "We all," says St. Ephrem, "prostrate ourselves before thee; we all ask thy intercession." "Why shouldst thou not come to the assistance of us sinners," says St. Anselm, "as thou hast been so highly exalted in our behalf? We recommend ourselves to thy mercy; watch over us that we may not go to destruction." The true Church also, agreeing with the holy fathers, in the Holy Mass of yesterday and today, testifies, that the Blessed Virgin was taken into heaven, there to pray for us. Besides, it is well known that the Church often has recourse to the Mother of God as our intercessor with the Most High, in the beautiful hymn of praise, "Salve Regina;" "Hail! holy Queen."

## PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Mary's death was caused by her love of God. Who can be surprised at this? She had continually lived in the love of God. All that she did or suffered, she did or suffered for the love of God. How will your death be? If you live without the love of God, or if you live under the displeasure of the Almighty, you have reason to fear that you will die in His displeasure. You have been told before now that you will probably die as you have lived. "Their end will be according to their works," says the holy apostle (II. Corinth, xi. 15). And the prophet Isaias wrote, long before: "Say to the just man that it is well; for, he shall eat the fruit of his doings. Wo to the wicked unto evil; for, the reward of his hands shall be given him (Isaias iii. 11)," that is to say, he will be punished as he deserves, according to his works. He has lived in sin; he shall die in sin and go to destruction. It is a miracle of divine mercy when anyone who has lived long in sin, dies happily. This may happen to one in a hundred. If you desire to die in the love and grace of God, endeavor to live in the love and grace of God. Keep your conscience free from sin. If you should have committed sin, either from weakness or wickedness, cleanse your soul immediately by the means which Christ has ordained, in order to be reinstated in the grace of the Almighty. Take care, also that you cultivate the love of God, as so many saints have done, in order that you may die in His love.

2. Mary was exalted in Heaven above all saints, because she had not only surpassed them in dignity, but also in merits and virtues. If you cannot surpass others in virtue and piety, endeavor, at least, to imitate them. Today resolve to imitate the divine mother in that virtue of which we have just spoken; fervent love for God. All that you say or do, say or do it for the love of God. Mary is called the mother of beautiful love. Beautiful love is to love God for Himself and our neighbor for His sake. Mary is the mother of beautiful, divine love. As such, invoke her today with great confidence. Beg her to obtain for you powerful graces that you too may die with burning love for the Giver of All Life. Oh! if you were so happy as to die from intense love for God! Pray for this with especial devotion this day and henceforth. Say in the Angelus, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death, amen." The custom of saying the Angelus is very ancient and has been practiced by the most zealous servants of God.

The following prayer is by St. Ephrem: "Protect me now and forevermore, O, divine mother! thou mother of mercy ! Save me, O holy and unspotted Virgin! from all harm and from the temptations of the Evil One. Be my intercessor at the hour of death, and guard me from the unquenchable fire. Deign, oh! most merciful mother, to receive me to contemplate the glory of thy Son."

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