

Father O'Connor's Homily for 15 August 2021
The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Revelation 11: 19a; 12: 1-6a; 10ab
1 Corinthians 15: 20-27
Luke 1: 39-56

In some Italian towns around Rome, there is a beautiful custom for the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven. It is called "l'Incinata," which means "the bowing procession."

The villagers carry a statue of the Blessed Virgin down the main street. Mary is on her way to heaven.

From the opposite direction comes another procession carrying a statue of Mary's Son, Jesus. He is coming to meet His mother.

Under an arch of branches and flowers, the two processions meet. The statues are made to bow to each other three times to remind us of Jesus welcoming His mother at the gates of heaven. Then the people carry the two statues side by side to the parish church. Our Lord is leading His Blessed Mother to her throne in heaven.

This ceremony of warmth and feeling is a striking way of expressing our belief that after her life on earth was finished, Mary was taken up body and soul to heaven.

God the Father did not want the mother of His Son to be touched by sin for even one second. So He gave her the privilege of the Immaculate Conception. From the moment that Mary was conceived in the womb of her mother, Saint Ann, she was never touched by the original sin of Adam and Eve. And we celebrate this on the Feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception on 8 December.

Throughout her life on earth, Mary never committed a single sin. Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, did not want the sinless body of His Mother to be subject to the corruption of the grave, so He gave her the privilege of the Assumption: Mary was taken up body and soul to heaven. And we celebrate this on today's Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven, 15 August.

This constant teaching of the Church was solemnly proclaimed on 1 November 1950 by Pope Pius XII. He declared infallibly 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" [*Munificentissimus Deus*, 44].

Notice the wording of today's feast: "Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." The Church has never defined whether or not Mary "died."

The Eastern Church speaks of "the dormition of Mary," Mary's "falling asleep" and then being assumed body and soul into heaven. After all, death is a consequence of original sin, and Mary Immaculate was sinless from the first moment her life began at her conception. So she is seen as being exempt from death.

The Western Church tends to think that Mary did indeed die a natural death and then was assumed body and soul into heaven. After all, her Son and God's Son, Jesus, truly died. So why would Mary not die since she is the perfect disciple of her Son?

While the question of Mary's falling asleep or actually dying has not been settled, what the Church teaches for sure is that "Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory."

What a joy for Jesus to welcome His Mother into His heavenly home. What a joy for Mary to see her Son in His glorified body. What a joy for Saint Joseph to have his wife, the companion of his earthly days, reunited with him in heaven.

With the celebration of the Assumption of Mary we can look forward to the day when we will enter heaven and be with God and all the angels and saints forever – and be reunited with all the people that we love who have gone before us.

We all have people in heaven that we can't wait to see again. And the older we get, the greater the number of people who are waiting to greet us on our arrival in heaven.

There is a story that is set in a seacoast village in New England about a young fisherman who lived with his widowed mother. Whenever he would set out for a fishing venture she never knew for sure when he would return. It all depended on the catch of fish. But she always made him this same promise as he left the house for a voyage: "I will light a candle in the window for you every evening until you come home."

This went on for many years. And then it happened. A neighbor was waiting for him at the dock that night and told him: "I am sorry to have to tell you this, but while you were out at sea, your mother died."

The fisherman was overcome with grief and, as he walked home, the tears began to flow. When he arrived, the house was totally dark and he wept in anguish. Then he looked up over their house and saw the evening star in the heavens. And he remembered his mother's promise: "I will light a candle in the window for you every evening until you come home."

One of the titles for Mary is found in the 8th century Latin hymn, “Ave, Maris Stella,” which means, “Hail, Star of the Sea.” Sailors would often interpret the appearance of the evening star as a reminder that Our Blessed Mother was watching over them from heaven. And this gave them reassurance as they made their way to their destinations.

The Assumption of Mary into heaven is reassurance to us. Where she has gone, we hope to follow.

And let us remember that Our Blessed Mother, “Star of the Sea,” our True North leading us to her Son, is always watching over us until, at last, we reach our final destination.

“I will light a candle in the window for you every evening until you come home.”

Mother of Christ, Star of the Sea,
Pray for the wanderer. Pray for me.

[from the hymn, “Hail, Queen of Heaven”]