

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AUGUST 14/15, 2010

Today's celebration of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our belief that Mary, due to her unique role in mystery of redemption as the human Mother of God's Son Jesus, through an act of divine grace, already has experienced the fullness resurrected life promised to all believers which all of us at the second coming of Christ at the end of all time. The Preface in today's Mass succinctly proclaims this faith stating: "the virgin Mother of God was taken up into heaven to be the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection, and a sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way" (Roman Missal: Preface of the Assumption).

When it comes to Mary her place and role in the church and our personal lives, we encounter two extremes: on the one hand an almost total ignoring of her to the point of denigration, and on the other an extreme exaltation to the point where she seems never to have been a real human being. The first represents a virulent view stemming from the Protestant Reformation, the latter an extreme form of Catholic piety. Neither is scripturally, doctrinally, or humanly accurate.

While the gospels give us vignettes in which Mary figures, much of her life is left to conjecture. Yet, I believe, reflecting briefly on these references can lead to a deeper understanding, appreciation and devotion to Mary, and also serve as a guide for our lives of faith.

As a teenager, Mary is faced with her vocation to be the mother of God's divine Son. She must decide what to do, take the risk of stepping out in faith, or simply go on living life as she has known it. Each of us at some time must face the same question of our life's direction with the same consequences. Do we choose for God or some other relationship?

In going to visit her cousin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, Mary seeks the counsel of a fellow believer, a reminder that the journey of faith is not one done

alone but with the support and encouragement of others in the community of faith. Who are the “Elizabeths” in our faith life, the “wisdom bearers” who can (or do) journey with us along the way? And if we do not presently have an “Elizabeth” who might we select as one?

Then there is the birth and early childhood of Jesus. Like all parents, Mary and Joseph, while joyful at the birth of their son, given the political and economic stress of the time must also have been filled with anxiety regarding what the future held for their child. Would they be up to the task of raising this child? At one point the Holy Family become refugees, fleeing the security of their own country and way of life as immigrants in another country. Then there is the encounter with the independence seeking teenager who had struck out on his own in Jerusalem and tells them he can make it on his own, that he must be about his “father’s business in his father’s house”. What was this child becoming? For those who are parents, guardians, grandparents or stand in other parental-like roles in the lives of children and young adults, Mary and Joseph can serve as intercessors along with you to God in your vocation. They’ve “been there, done that”.

Tradition tells us that sometime between the teenage years of Jesus and his public ministry, Joseph died. How did Mary cope with the emptiness, the loneliness, the grief? If you are a widow or widower, Mary understands.

Finally, there is the helplessness, anguish, grief and utter emptiness Mary endures as she faces a parent’s worst nightmare, the death of her child. In her grief, Mary turned in faith to God. As we face the inevitable “deaths” in life, we have someone who understands and can help us.

As we celebrate Mary’s faith-filled life of “yes” to God in every circumstance, and God’s ultimate “yes” to her, we pray that, one day it may also be said of us, “Blessed are you who believed that God’s word to you would be fulfilled.”