

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

On a tall hill in Jerusalem, Mt. Sion in fact, is the Church of the Dormitian, of sleep! If Mary was without sin did she die or did she fall asleep at the end of her life and be lifted into heaven from there? If death is the wages of sin, could Mary die? The tradition in the eastern churches is that she slept, in the west the question has been left open. In his encyclical letter declaring the dogma of the Assumption in 1950 Pope Pius XII left the question open. Because the practicalities of Mary's Assumption are not what this feast is truly about. What do our readings tell us today?

The first reading is as mystical as the Book of Revelation always is. What does it hold within the story? That Mary came to bring a special child into the world for the world's salvation and there was always a threat to it from the powers of evil, all that is opposed to God's gift of salvation. Yet the promise is there for us. Evil will never win, even if the child faces many challenges as does his mother.

The second reading begins the last chapter of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which is dedicated to the resurrection. The inclusion of this passage tells us what the feast is actually about. At the feast's heart is both the completion of Mary's task in this world which began with her saying 'Yes' to the Lord's messenger, the angel Gabriel, and, as Elizabeth says, trusting in his promise, and the promise to us of ours that we hear so clearly in the prayers at our baptism.

And the gospel, well known to us all. Where Mary prays and gives to us her great prayer of the Magnificat. Why choose this as opposed to the story of the angel Gabriel's appearance? To me this is the moment when we see Mary in a new light. No longer the uncertain young woman, but now someone who is taking charge of her life and the work that God has given her. The one who now has confidence in her trust in the Lord, and is ready to give birth to this special child. What will be his journey? Like every parent she does not know. But in her prayer she shows us how to approach God, in humility and trust, while declaring for the first time in the gospel, possibly Simeon was first, how revolutionary would be the message of this child, and how revolutionary would be his effect on this world. Particularly on his vision of the perfect society which would be a foretaste on the Kingdom of Heaven.

From her 'Yes' to the cross, if we follow his call we will see a taste of the Kingdom of Heaven, peace and love and new life.

So, Mary's 'Yes' both opens to us our encounter with God in the person of Jesus Christ, but then she leads us in her Assumption, to our resurrection, that perfect encounter with God that is the fulfilment of the Kingdom, where we will be at home with Mary for all time.