

Homily: Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady, 16th August 2020

If we were celebrating today's feast in Germany, we wouldn't call it 'The Assumption'. The German word for it is *Himmelfahrt* – literally, 'heaven-journey'. Today is the climax of Mary's journey to heaven, as she enters, body and soul, into the glory God has prepared for her.

Mary is a woman of journeys: she travelled with Joseph to Bethlehem before the birth of her Son; she went with them both into exile in Egypt to escape the murderous intentions of King Herod; she went each year on pilgrimage to Jerusalem with her family; she walked the way of the cross with Jesus, sharing in her Son's Passion as He went to His death for our salvation. And today we hear of the first of Mary's journeys that is mentioned in Scripture. Having heard the Angel Gabriel's message, she conceives the Saviour; Jesus is present in her womb; she is a temple in which God dwells. Then she immediately sets out on a journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth: a journey, we are told, which takes her up into the hill country of Judah. Already Mary's upward journey has begun: she goes up to the heights. Her ultimate destiny is heaven.

When we were baptised, in a very real sense we also became temples in which God would dwell. And in that sacrament we too began our journey to the heights. From the moment we received the grace of being adopted as God's children in baptism, we are making a journey to the heights of heaven. It's beautiful to know that we walk in Mary's footsteps; she has already traced the path for us: a path of openness to God's will, a path of cooperating with God's grace; a path of faith and trust, whatever trials we experience on the way.

Today Mary appears as a sign that God will fulfil all His promises to us. "A great sign appeared in heaven", the first reading says, "a woman, adorned with the sun, standing on the moon, and with twelve stars on her head for a crown." This woman gives birth to the Saviour; she then escapes persecution and danger and is taken up to the throne of God Himself. Mary has given birth to our Saviour; she has escaped the persecutions and sufferings of this life and has been taken up to the throne of God. So we rejoice with her and for her! But she is also a great sign in heaven *for us*: a sign of our goal, a sign which encourages us on our heaven-journey. St Paul promises today that all people will be brought to life in Christ, but all in their proper order: Christ first, he says, then those who follow. And it is Mary who follows Him most closely.

Yesterday we marked the 75th anniversary of VJ day, an event which effectively brought the Second World War to an end. The first decades of the twentieth century were marred by death and violence on a scale the world had never witnessed before. Across two world wars, countless people were slaughtered on the battle fields or killed by bombs. Five years after the war ended, in 1950, Pope Pius XII solemnly proclaimed the Assumption of Our Lady as a dogma to be believed by all Catholics. The Church had long believed and celebrated this feast, but it was necessary to give it extra weight, because the Church wanted to affirm that the human person, body and soul, is holy to the Lord. After so much

destruction, the Church proclaims the value of life, the value of the human body. Mary is held up as a sign for us: it is not only our souls which will be redeemed, but our bodies too: one day, we too hope to live, body and soul, in glory.

In today's Gospel, Elizabeth says of Mary: "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled". And blessed are we, when we too believe that God's promises will be fulfilled for us. We are blessed because we always have hope; we are blessed because we know that we can be completely saved and healed by Christ: even our bodies, with all their infirmities, will be redeemed. We are blessed because by this hope we learn to live in such a way as to use our bodies for the glory of God, and never in any way contrary to His will.

It's easy, when making a long journey, to get distracted along the way. There are beautiful things to enjoy, wonderful things to see, new things to discover as we travel. But a true traveller never completely forgets his or her destination. As people of faith, we have Mary, a guiding light, a sign in heaven, who reminds us what life is all about. We are making our heaven-journey. May Our Lady, the Star of the Sea who has so often guided weary travellers, lead us by her example, encourage us because she has already arrived at the destination, and always accompany us with her prayers.

Fr Andrew

