



Mosaic of the Dormition of Mary
Basilica of the Assumption in Jerusalem

SOME ASSUMPTION ASSUMPTIONS

Each year on August 15th we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary, and more often than not, Catholics are obliged to participate in Mass on this occasion. What are we celebrating on this feast and why is it such a big deal?

The Bodily Ascension of Jesus

“...We believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. Amen” The Second Person of the Trinity, who had neither a body nor a beginning, descended from heaven “for us men and for our salvation.” Jesus, full God and full man, had both a beginning and a body. It was Jesus who suffered, died, rose, ascended, and has entered into the Trinity. Since the Ascension of Jesus, there is a body *in God. Matter matters.*

The Bodily Assumption of Mary

“When her time on earth was completed” (our Tradition neither teaches that Mary did die nor that Mary did not die), Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven, into Christ and therefore into the Trinity. At that moment, Jesus’ body was not the only body in God; at that point, Mary’s body because it was in Christ, was in God. In celebrating the Assumption of Mary into heaven, we are celebrating our belief that our own bodies are destined to be in God. As we profess our faith each Sunday we say, “we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.” *Matter Matters.*

Our Cemetery is a Lively Place

Our Parish Cemetery is an active place, as the sign near its focal Cross states:

*Welcome to Saint Ann Cemetery,
an **Act** of Saint Ann Parish.*

*Here bodies of our beloved await the Resurrection and the
Life of the World to come.*

*Here we acknowledge their mark
on this earth and in our lives.*

*Here we pray for the repose of their souls
as we pray for the repose of our own souls.*

*Here we come to seek and profess faith,
to have hope renewed,
and to continue our love in the Communion of Saints.*

*In and through these bodies
Christ himself has loved and was loved.*

Even More

We pray in the third Eucharistic Prayer, “**all creation** rightly gives you praise.” In the Psalms we pray, “**sun and moon** bless the Lord, **stars** of heaven, bless the Lord.” At Christmas we sing, “Joy to the World...Let heaven **and nature** sing.” At Easter we sing, “**All creatures** (monkeys; broccoli; rocks; water; etc.) of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing, Alleluia!” Pope Benedict speaks about the cosmic dimensions of the Christ event. ***Matter matters.***

Moral Matter

In Western moral reflection, the meaning or morality of an act has often been seen as being composed of and of being determined by the interplay of three factors, namely: 1) Matter, 2) Intention, and 3) Circumstances. Matter is the act itself and its “beyond-me” effects; intention is what I mean when I do the act; circumstances are the larger contexts within which the act and my intention occur.

A gun is fired. A man is killed. Meaning? Morality?

While taking a life is always and everywhere grave matter, the moral meaning of varies. This is expressed legally in such determinations as: 1st degree murder; 2nd degree murder; manslaughter, negligent homicide, justifiable homicide, accidental death. We say that “the penalty must **fit** the crime”, and at times, the act of killing, while always grave, is no crime at all.

Yet, because of the **gravity** of such an act, even after a justifiable homicide, law enforcement officers must take time off, see and be cleared by a psychiatrist before they can be returned to duty. The act bears meaning in itself. ***Matter matters.***

“The Dictatorship of Relativism”

On the one hand, the meaning of an action cannot be reduced solely to the act itself. On the other hand, the meaning of an act cannot be reduced merely to my intention. This is what Pope Benedict is referring to when he speaks of the “dictatorship of relativism” which pervades Western culture. So often, we speak and act as though our intention is the only thing that matters, that is moral matter.

“I Didn’t Mean It”

“I didn’t mean it.” This expression that everyone one of us has uttered contains an important, but often missed, point. What **I mean** when I do something does not exhaust **the meaning** of the act. **IT** has meaning. Actions speak. Actions mean. Actions matter. Actions have weight, gravity,

gravitas. I once hear the actor-comedian Robin Williams say that he knew he had grown up when he realized that “life was about more than me.” The best selling book *The Purpose-Directed Life* opens with the words, “It’s not about you.” Although I would modify those words to say, “It’s not only about you”, the point is: ***Matter matters morally.***

Purgatory

In meditating on our crucified Lord’s words to the criminal on his right, “This day you shall be with me in Paradise”, I have at times engaged in the following prayer exercise.

Lord, this man, who has admitted that he and his partner “deserve to die”, tortured and killed my entire family. I am now alone, homeless, penniless, and incapacitated by grief.

Jesus, you are God and you can do what you choose. I have nothing to say about who you forgive and let into heaven, but: what about my wife, my son, my daughter, my mother, my aunt, my cousin---and me. Don’t we ***matter?***

I believe that the Catholic teaching about post-death and post-judgment purgation is an attempt to wrestle with not only the moral but even more the spiritual material-ness of our actions. When we speak of purgatory, we are taking into account the more-than-me-ness of our actions. We are factoring in the effects of our actions on creation, others, God, and our own souls. ***Matter matters spiritually.***

“Set Out Into the Deep”

Toward the end of his life, Pope John Paul II, quoting Jesus (Luke 5:4), encouraged us to “set out into the deep”. I think that our annual celebration of the Assumption of Mary is a fit occasion for us to examine our assumptions about some things that lie bellow the surface of life.

“I Didn’t Mean It” - Some Additional Unpackings

If “it” means, then some matter for further moral reflection would be: Mass, sex, and empire.

“I don’t mean anything when I miss Mass.” Is there a meaning *in* the Mass apart from what I mean when I do or do not participate in the Sunday Eucharist? Are there any more-than-me-ness effects of my absence, for example on others?

Is meaningless sex even possible? Is there a meaning in the sexual act prior to and apart from what we mean when we engage in the act?

We in the USA have more than 700 military installations throughout the world. We monitor the globe from space. We disregard national borders with drone attacks. Might there be more meaning to such acts than what we mean by them?

We say that we may not and should not “take the law into our own hands.” Is there anything else in this life so highly charged, so prone to imbalance, so **weighty** that I cannot bear the meaning of it in isolation, apart from linkage with others including my ancestors, for instance: the Most Blessed Sacrament; sex; power? Does matter matter?

The Assumptions of Mary

The Assumption of the Prime Disciple is related to the assumptions of Mary, and the most developed presentation of her assumptions is found in her song (Luke 1: 46-57):

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.

He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.

He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.

The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.

He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."



The Dormition of Mary
Ephesus, Turkey