

AUGUST 20, 2023: 20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



This past week we celebrated the feast of the Assumption of Mary—a beautiful and powerful celebration. It does not simply teach us something about Mary, but rather, it tries to remind us of a powerful truth about our lives. Our deepest desire should be about getting to heaven. And our lives should reflect this desire in everything we do and say. So many people will speak about their ‘bucket list’—the things they want to do or experience before they die. I have no such bucket list. Quite simply there is nothing on this wondrous Earth that will even come close to what we will experience when we come face to face with our God. St. Thomas Aquinas demonstrated this truth shortly

before his death. He experienced the beatific vision, i.e., seeing God in his glory. Thomas is quoted as saying, “The end of my labors has come. All that I have written appears to be as so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me.” He never completed his *Summa Theologiae*, one of the pivotal theological works of the Church, but even in its uncompleted state it still impacts Church teaching to this day.

This feast day then reminds us of what we should be truly striving for—Heaven! How Mary lived her life teaches us how to accept the salvation Christ won for us and get to heaven.

At the Annunciation the angel greets Mary with “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you.” Our first meeting with Mary in scripture teaches us of the importance of God’s grace in our life. All that Mary will teach and accomplish in her life will be grounded in the grace that is central to any person’s relationship with God. We are completely and wholly dependent upon God and the grace He pours into our lives. We cannot accomplish anything of meaning, value, or purpose apart from that grace. As we seek to live out our lives as people saved in Jesus Christ, it will only be possible through what God does for us and, most fundamentally, the grace He shares with us.

As Mary finishes her conversation with Gabriel, she clearly announces her desire to follow the Lord. Grace gives her the strength to humble herself before God. She cries out, “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word.” Mary’s fiat is the quintessential definition of humility. She does not really ask any questions. She simply accepts the role God is calling her to as her part in the plan of salvation. We are all called to be part of God’s salvific plan and, like Mary, we must humble ourselves to accept the role He is calling us to live out. The only way we can truly do this is to model Mary and humble ourselves. That humility will strengthen us to continue the journey Mary is leading us on.

Mary’s humility leads her to go in haste to the hill country to visit her elderly cousin Elizabeth. Mary is pregnant at this point, and traveling this great distance could not have been easy for her. But Mary does not hesitate to act, which allows her to bring the presence of Jesus into the lives of others. We also must not hesitate to be the presence of Christ to others. We must live out the Gospel with fidelity and hope. We must truly believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that He really is the only way to the Father. The world will try to silence us in many different ways, but our actions must be true to Christ and thus lead others to Him.

As people of true faith, we need to live our lives trusting in God. If we do this, then the words spoken by Elizabeth will apply to us as well: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.” God has not promised us wealth, health, or good tidings. Rather, He has promised us that He will always be with us to help us through difficult times. He will never forsake or abandon us, and He will give us the strength to fly like eagles. Mary, by accepting the role God called her to, was placing her life in mortal danger. Joseph could easily have denounced her as one who had committed adultery, which meant death by stoning. But Mary believed that God would fulfill his promises and so she allowed her faith to guide her through this moment.

With faith and trust in God, Mary proclaimed her praise and thanksgiving to God. “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” A true life of faith must lead one to praise and glorify the Lord. We must be a people of thanksgiving. The heart of this praise and thanksgiving is simply to glorify God for being God. It is not about what He can or cannot do for us. Mary is not praising God for what He can do for her, but rather, for allowing her to be his faithful servant. God is worthy of praise for no other reason than He is God. We cannot have a true relationship with God if it is based on expectation: that is not a relationship of love, but

of transaction. God does something for me and so, in return, I do something for God. God shows us true love by simply creating us. He gains nothing from our existence. He simply does what is best for us and that opens us to experience his unconditional love. A life of true praise and thanksgiving will lead us to live a life centered in unconditional love.

We will continue next week this exploration of Mary and salvation.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org , or if easier please call or text me at 978-254-0560.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian".

Fr. Brian