

+ J. M. J.

Some say that since the Vatican Council defined papal infallibility it has been only invoked once in the past one hundred fifty years. They are of course referring to the dogma of the Assumption. In order to have this discussion of the first place assumes that this solemnity is one of great importance; it is a holyday of obligation. It preempts what normally would be the twentieth Sunday in ordinary time. Why? Because the mystery of what happens with the Blessed Virgin Mary in her body reveals to us truths of the last things, death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

We frequently are faced with an uncomfortable truth. We are all going to die. No matter how comfortably we live our lives or if we still are blinded by a youthful exuberance that makes us think we are going to live forever, we will be brought to reality at sudden news that either we have come face-to-face with our own mortality or someone close to us has come face-to-face with his or hers. We instinctively know that we have no power over death; it can't be avoided. In difficult moments we begin rightfully asking what is on the other side.

Because of our powerlessness, because death was not in the original plan given to Adam and Eve, we need a Savior. We know that Jesus is true God and true man. In his humanity he can die. In his divinity he rises from the dead, and because Jesus so closely unites himself with every person through the sacrament of baptism, he shares with us his power over death. That is what St. Paul means when he says **“since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man.”** St. Paul goes onto say **“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”** What does that mean? Well, death can only be destroyed if every body that has ever been placed into the grave is to rise and be restored to life once again. That is indeed what will happen at Christ's second coming.

We turn then to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Certainly there are many saints in heaven. Our canonized saints are the ones our Church tells us for certain are living this perfect life; however, when we say Mary has been assumed into heaven we believe that she is there body and soul enjoying in fullness that which

satisfies every one of our desires, “to be with Christ” who is life for where Christ is the kingdom of heaven.

When we confess Mary’s perpetual virginity we also recognize her spiritual integrity. Her whole life, as Pope Pius XII states, was intimately united to her divine Son and she was the whole-hearted companion of the divine Redeemer.<sup>1</sup> For someone who was so close to Jesus for her entire life then it is fitting and highly symbolic that no corruption should ever touch her body.

St. Paul uses a word, firstfruits, to appeal to a farming culture what Christ’s resurrection of the dead means for them and all of us today. In that Christ is the first means that there are others to follow in his path. When we speak of Mary being physically in heaven it is a reminder that she anticipates the resurrection of other Christians,<sup>2</sup> me and you. We pause and think about that for a moment. After our bodies have been deposited in the ground or burned, at the resurrection we will get them back. For this reason our faith instructs us to treat even a dead human body with the utmost reverence and respect. Those who have united themselves with Christ in this life will look upon Jesus, the saints, their loved ones with our very own eyes. Those in heaven will be able to touch and embrace others. They will hear with their very own ears the triumphant singing of the “Holy, holy, holy Lord.” But, Mary is a reminder to us that this is only possible if we completely give ourselves to Jesus (either before we die or by being purged afterwards) for it is he who is “the resurrection and the life.”

Let then Mary’s life be a call for us to change our lives to be more like hers in avoiding sin and following Jesus at every moment just as she did. Let me end with how Eucharistic Prayer III in Masses for the dead reminds us of the life in heaven for those who follow Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950) 38; 40.

<sup>2</sup> CCC 966.

**There we hope to share in your glory**

**when every tear will be wiped away.**

**On that day we shall see you, our God, as you are.**

**We shall become like you**

**and praise you for ever through Christ our Lord,**

**from whom all good things come.**

May God bless you.