

Commentary on Sunday Scripture

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

First reading:

*The Woman Robed with the Sun
(Revelation 11.19a, 12.1-6, 10ab)*

This vision of the woman giving birth and of the huge red dragon is bewilderingly rich in biblical symbolism. The context of the Book of Revelation is the struggle between the Church and the demands of Roman paganism, particularly the demand that all should worship the emperor as God. The purpose of Revelation is to reassure the faithful of victory, despite the threat of martyrdom.

The woman represents Israel, the people of God, who gives birth to a son, the true ruler of the universe. The dragon, of great sagacity and immense power, is the Roman Empire. The son is unhesitatingly whipped up to heaven in triumph, frustrating the evil dragon of its prey and issuing immediately in the hymn of triumph. The perspective is, of course, foreshortened, omitting the details of Christ's earthly life, to show the certainty of the son's triumph.

Secondarily, tradition sees in the woman the earthly mother of the Saviour, Mary, mother of Jesus and mother of the Church, who triumphs over all the powers of evil. The secondary symbolism, therefore, is that Mary is the great sign in heaven of triumph over evil. Evil has no hold on Mary, and her children are sure of victory

Question:

Is this a fair picture of the history of the Church?

Second reading:

*Christ, Firstborn from the Dead
(1 Corinthians 15.20-26)*

On the Festival of the Assumption of Mary it is important to get things in the right order. Christ is the firstborn from the dead. In him, all will be brought to life, but all in their proper order.

Mary is the first after her Son, and raised by her Son because she is part of his Body, the Church. The perfection of the Mother of the Saviour is won for her by her Son. He draws her after him in his retinue.

In this chapter, Paul is teaching about bodily Resurrection. This is not merely immortality of the soul, but the Resurrection of the whole person, an animated body, not a soul hidden in a body. It is particularly fitting with regard to Mary, the physical mother of Jesus, who gave to him her genes, her personality, her features and her talents. If any son takes after his mother physically, it must have been Jesus.

he declaration by the Church of the Assumption of Mary is an assertion of the saving value of all our activity, the healing touch, the conquest of pain, exhaustion, moodiness and physical temptation in all its forms. That is why Mary goes ahead of us all and leads the way to full Resurrection.

Question:

What is the best way to honour Mary?

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Gospel

(Luke 1.39-56)

Mary's Visit to Elizabeth

The core of this gospel reading is Mary's canticle of thanksgiving for God's gifts to her. It is, however, fitting that, on the Feast of the bodily Assumption of Mary, it should begin with her bodily attention to the bodily needs of her elderly relative.

With her own baby on the way, she would have plenty of other priorities, making her long journey an act of real kindness. Her canticle, sung daily in the liturgy of Evening Prayer, sums up God's faithfulness to his promises, focused on his gifts to this simple peasant girl. It combines a wonderful sense of the holiness of God with warmth of gratitude, showing the thoughts that revolved constantly in her mind.

As is fitting in the mouth of a girl whose only knowledge of books was the Bible, Mary's song is a texture of scriptural phrases. We cannot assume that Luke wrote it down at Mary's dictation, for putting words in the mouth of his characters is a feature of Luke the historian; but it must reflect her thinking.

If any theme resounds again and again throughout the Bible, it is God's care for the poor, the simple and those in need. It is this that sets the Hebraeo-Christian tradition apart from the ways of the world

Question:

Why is the Assumption an important doctrine of the Church?
