

Good morning everyone,

This Sunday, 15th August, we celebrate the major feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the day that traditionally marks her transition from this life to the full resurrection life of her Son and Lord. The festival has various names. In the West it is normally called the 'Assumption of Mary,' whereas in the East it is known as her 'Dormition' or Falling Asleep. Another title is 'Mary's Easter' and in England in the Middle Ages it was popularly known as 'Lady Day in Harvest.' On this day, we are reminded of our own hope and destiny as followers of Christ, walking in the footsteps of his saints, of whom his mother Mary, in her lowliness and openness, is the greatest. Her example of hearing and obeying the word of God is set before us as a pattern for the Christian journey. As she accepted God's invitation to be the mother of Christ, so we in are called to 'give birth' to Christ in our own lives.

Revelation 11: 19 – 12: 6 & 10

Any passage from the Book of Revelation, and this one in particular, is difficult to understand and even more difficult to summarise. The book is set against the background of the Roman Empire and the persecution of Christians, and it is mostly written as a vision that has been experienced by the author. Using the contemporary Jewish tradition of apocalyptic writing, he draws on other ancient near eastern mythological themes in his symbolic representation of the battle between good and evil, a battle in which evil represented by the dragon would ultimately be defeated. The figure of the woman is the people of God represented by the twelve stars. Initially this means the people Israel and then the Church. Among this people is the Messiah whose elevation to the throne of God will make him king of the universe and ultimately victorious over the powers of evil. By giving birth to the Messiah the woman can naturally be identified as Mary. She is being identified simultaneously as a symbol of faithful Israel and also of the Christian people coping with the enormous challenges of the times.

Galatians 4: 4 – 7

The fatherhood of God for those who are baptized into Christ, those who have 'put on Christ,' is guaranteed by Jesus' own relationship to the Father. Through this relationship human nature is transformed, at least for those who follow Christ. Against all expectation, the Son of God took the same route into human life that all human beings take, 'born of a woman,' with all that this means in terms of vulnerability, dependence and need of nurture. For those who follow him, life is changed, enhanced. Those who live in Christ are children of God and heirs with Christ of everything that God has to give them.

Luke 1: 46 – 55

The Magnificat, the song of Mary, is one of three canticles given in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel and they all focus on the spirituality of those who are 'poor in the Lord' and whose lives will be transformed by the grace and power of God. Mary's song is modelled on the song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2: 1 – 10), and it draws on several other Old Testament texts. The song focuses entirely on the work of God in exalting the God-fearing humble and poor. The illusions of security which comfort the rich and powerful are shattered by the justice and solidarity that God has for those who are voiceless and powerless. The kingdom of God which will be inaugurated by Mary's son will include the exaltation of those who know their need of God (who are not exclusively the materially poor though most of them are). With the later Church's capitulation to the power structures and empires of the day, it is surprising

that Christians who said or sung the Magnificat were not rounded up and charged with sedition! Happily, and not before time, the Church today, and hopefully each one of us who claim to be Christian, have begun to take the gospel seriously once again.

A prayer for the day:

Almighty God, you lift up the humble and meek. In Mary, you have given us a vision of a Church that knows how to serve and to hold on to you in life and in death. With her, and in the strength of your Son and hers, may we be humble enough to listen to your word, to live by it and to share it, so that more and more we may be to the world the visible body of your Son in our own time, until you let us share in his glory for ever. Amen.

Wishing you every blessing for Sunday and the coming week.

Love and prayers,

John