

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Rev 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab

Ps 45:10, 11, 12, 16

1 Cor 15:20-27

Lk 1:39-56

The Whispers of Jesus David A. Cregan, OSA

For several years I had the opportunity to work in the RCIA with adult men and women in the process of converting to Catholicism. All of these people were searching for God in their lives. Some had been raised by their families with no religious education whatsoever, some were converting from non-Christian faiths, but, for the most part, the majority of those whom I worked with were baptized Christians who, for one reason or another, were being drawn by God to look more deeply into the faith, doctrine, devotion, and ritual of Roman Catholicism.

Accompanying individuals in their journey towards God is a tremendous blessing and a continual opportunity to convey to those who do not understand our faith the deepest truths which we experience about God in our common pilgrimage as Catholics. The occasion to instruct candidates in the RCIA process, particularly in the liturgical practices of the Roman Catholic liturgy, never fails to illuminate new depth and richer meaning for the experienced Catholic teacher.

While many, if not most, of the experiences of the catechist are faith enriching, oftentimes one is faced with difficult and challenging questions. For those who are converting from Protestant churches the age-old tradition of Catholic devotion to the Saints, and in particular our deep and abiding devotion to the Blessed Mother, can be a particular stumbling block. Questions persist and abound: "Why do we need intercession if through the incarnation of Jesus we have been given direct access to God? Do Catholics worship Mary? Where in the scripture do you find justification for such a peculiarly Roman practice?" For those who teach the faith many of these devotions are taken for granted as part-and parcel of our Catholic lives and, consequently, we have never had to explain our devotion to the Mother of God, we have never had to articulate the love for her which has been passed on from one generation to the next.

Why do we feel such a deep passion and practice such a constant devotion to Mary? Why is there such a powerful emotional current which runs through our devotion and inspires us Catholics to seek her wisdom, her conviction, and her intercession? What has compelled our Church to translate this ancient Christian devotion into doctrine?

Essentially, what in the tradition and inspiration of Catholic Christianity has bound our faith in Jesus so closely with our love and devotion to the Blessed Mother?

Today's first reading from the book of Revelation, in all the magnificence of its apocalyptic language, speaks of "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown with twelve stars". This fantastic and vivid story sets forth for us a glorious and highly dramatic account of Mary's role in the destiny of all creation, the cosmic fortune of the entire universe. She is portrayed as triumphantly robed with all of the splendor which creation has to offer, rewards for her loyalty to the God of the universe, benefits given to her for her human role in conquering evil and bringing about the sovereignty of God. In this reading we can hear the echoes of the doctrine of the Feast of the Assumption, the truth that God had compassionately prepared a special place for this courageous woman. This mere mortal is described as having a special place prepared for her by God because of her role in giving birth to a son destined to "shepherd all the nations". Because of the horrors she withstood in the face of the flaming red dragon waiting to devour her newborn son she is rewarded with the everlasting protection and sustenance of God.

Our magnificent Mother in heaven, Our Lady of the Assumption, gave birth to a son whom she watched die on a cross, and because of her courage she now dwells in a special place prepared for her by the God of the Incarnation, the Father of Jesus Christ.

For all its spectacle and heightened metaphor the inspirational story in the first reading is ultimately remote from human experience. Where the Book of Revelations is majestic in its vision, today's gospel from Luke is as equally domestic in its sentiment and moving in its emotion. Mary, compelled by her love for Elizabeth, visits her kinswoman, and Elizabeth's child stirs with a primordial recognition of the power of what God is doing through the young Mary. The great Life and great Light poured upon Mary in her fiat, her 'yes' to God, cannot help but stir the very life within Elizabeth's womb. God reached through the ordinary experience of human beings, in a way in which He never had done before, to stir powerful emotions and a deep recognition of Truth. Mary's entire being is literally flooded with the energy and design of God, an abundance which she pours forth on all those who come into contact with her.

But still, this seems to be more about Mary than Jesus! Why do we feel as though we know her, and why does she elicit such affection in our Christian sensibility?

Perhaps it is Jesus who has taught us such a deep love for his own mother. Upon the cross he offered her, through John, to us as our mother forever. Upon the cross he also reached down and offered us his Spirit to guide us and teach us. His Spirit which is his presence, not his absence. Throughout our history as a Church we have relied on that living Spirit to guide us in all of our actions, to inspire us towards greater love, true forgiveness, unconditional peace, and unrestrained charity. Through the Holy Spirit, through our participation in the sacraments of the Church, through our prayer lives, both common and private, the Lord has continued to instruct us his disciples in his ways. By the presence of the Holy Spirit we have been called throughout human history to be more

than we every could of imagined we could be, Jesus has been our guide, our inspiration, our pull towards that which embodies the coming of God's Kingdom, the freedom from all that restrains us from goodness and holds us back from godliness.

Is it possible then that along with his unwavering inspiration, his persistent interior call to us to move towards greater love, compassion, charity and forgiveness, his constant living encouragement to move beyond what seems humanly impossible and towards divine possibility, that Jesus has also whispered into our hearts the ardent love which he felt in his lifetime for his mother? Our deep and emotional dedication to the Blessed Mother may be one of the many gifts which Jesus pours down on us his faithful, gifts of inspiration which teach us of God's plan. This could well be possible since he obviously continues to instruct us, his modern-day disciples, in what continues to be most important in his plan for humanity. Just as he continually instructs us in our everyday reactions to the challenges of life to respond to what he was passionate about on earth, the things he felt were the most important virtues to embody in this life, so he might also teach us the great love he felt for the devotion and discipleship of his own mother; God's great love for the one who was at both the nativity, and at the foot of the cross. She was the gateway through which he came into this world, the entry place of the greatest outpouring of Life the world has ever known.

The Lord pours all of this wisdom, guidance, and love upon us through the Eucharist. As we celebrate this outpouring today let us ask the Lord to continue to instruct and inspire us towards the values and principles which He considers most virtuous, loving, and courageous. The values embodied in the mother he loved, the disciple and believer for whom he chose an extraordinary place forever in heaven.