



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Mother of Unity

Readings: Ap 11:19;12: 1-6, 10; Ps 44, 1 Corinthians 15: 20-26, Luke 1: 39-56

The Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady is always a poignant moment of the year for our family because it was, coincidentally, the birthday of my late mother-in-law, a woman to whom I owe much and who is held in affectionate memory by us all. She was much nearer to the Mother of Grace than the mother of the Music Hall jest and our family life would have been immeasurably poorer without her. Her endless, quiet self-giving to the next generations, her implicit and explicit support and encouragement, her self-sacrifice and often unseen work all went to make up the riches of our lives and the opportunities of the ministry given to each of us.

This recognition of the power of the maternal in the little and the local and the particular applies, on a cosmic scale, to the role of Our Lady in the mystery of Salvation.

The Church has always recognised this in Mary and seen her as the very ikon of the Church. We turn to her as Mother because that is what her Son commanded from the Cross. To the Beloved Disciple he gave this inestimable gift. 'Behold, your mother.'

We turn to her because, as Mother of Our Lord, she is the adoptive mother of all who will become little brothers and sisters of Jesus.

We name churches after her because she exemplifies the mystery of the Church. Open always to the Holy Spirit of God, she brings the Word of God into the world, incarnate in Jesus Christ. Every church is an outpost of The Church and The Church is doing the work of Mary in presenting Christ to the world.

It is no accident, therefore, that one of the most precious titles of Our Lady is 'Ark of the Covenant'. Here in this great Old Testament image we see further explanation of God's purpose and intention for Man.

The Ark of the Covenant was designed by God to house the Word He was giving to the people via Moses. God's revelation is housed in this beautiful container marked by the cherubic presence of the heavenly host. The Ark is given a power to overcome the enemy, as at Jericho, and to allow the faithful to pass dry-shod through the Jordan into the land of the promise. What God chooses to reveal to Man is given a special dignity. So it is with Our Lady. Fashioned in her immaculacy and chosen by God, she contains within her, for presentation to the world, the very Word of God, His complete and final revelation of Himself translated into our humanity – yet without sin.

Here, according to Holy Scripture, is the Real Presence, borne aloft by the priests before the people on their long journey to the Promised Land.

So, for Christians down the millennia, our self-understanding as the Church has been radically informed by this image of the interplay of the divine reality with the immaculate humanity of Mary, mother of us all.

Mary is the Godbearer, the Theotokos, the title granted by the Councils of the Church and undisputed by Christians down the ages.

One of the great tragedies of the Reformation schism was to lose sight of this magnificent truth about Our Lady. Whatever Luther's foibles, follies or falsehoods it was never his intention to remove Our Lady from the Church's self-understanding and ironically he retained a devotion to her throughout the revolution he set in train. But non-Catholic theology set itself on a course that, 'liberated' from Our Lady, found no place for the feminine and, predictably in due course, belatedly understanding its lack, fell victim to the secular feminist critique and, in dire panic, sought to restore the balance by the further error of 'priesting' women, thereby fatally misunderstanding the nature of Christian family life, distorting eternal iconography and miscasting the mystery of the feminine in the plan of salvation.

Instead of returning to the Church's understanding of God's revelation through Mary, this has compounded the error and pushed the sacred quest for unity off course. Because it is in our understanding of Mary and her role in salvation that the quest for unity finds its true course and home. There can only be one family. There can only be one Church. The concept of 'churches' is an oxymoron, an affront to Christ's sovereign command. There can only be one revelation, one Christ, one Son of God and Son of Mary. There cannot be as many Christs as there are dissenting conventicles, personal opinions, pop-up pastors and cable TV clerics.

In Mary those who seek faithfully to follow Christ will find their exemplar, open to the Holy Spirit, obedient to the teaching of the Church and presenting Jesus the Saviour to the world.

In Mary those who set out from Nazareth on the long road to the heavenly Jerusalem will find the true motherhood of the Church in her constant devotion to God and to her children of the Cross.

In Mary those who seek to faithfully follow her Son will find, in this day above all days, their glorious destiny with the saints in light prefigured in the Assumption of Our Lady.

As Mary once held the new-born Christ in her arms at Bethlehem and presented Him to the world so, on this day Christ raised up Our Lady in His arms and welcomed her home, first among the saints and Queen of Heaven. As we are privileged to hold Christ in our hands in the Mass and go out to present Him to the world, so He will receive us in His arms at the moment of our mortality and lead us ever onward into the realms of light.

Pray, brothers and sisters, that the day may hasten, by the prayers of Our Blessed Mother and His, when this feast of our destiny may, once more, become a feast of the whole people of God, united in one faith, one future, one family, little brothers and sisters of the Risen Lord.