

“Mercifully grant that we may be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure.” [Collect for Trinity 11]

+

There are two different Gospel passages available for today. As you may have noticed, the one printed in the bulletin was not what we heard which was St. Mary saying the Magnificat. The passage printed, however, was what was heard however up north in Cheyenne today since it is in their American Edition of the *Anglican Missal* where here we have the, “rarer” to find today, *The American [Anglican] Missal*. It is a passage we all know well about Jesus visiting Mary and Martha which I will discuss in a bit.

Indeed, we could have chosen yet **another** Gospel also since today we had the option of celebrating the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity or the Feast of the Assumption of the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary. Assumption comes from the Latin word *assumptire* meaning: to take up. Since we have an Eleventh Sunday after Trinity every year and the Assumption will not occur on a Sunday again for five years I thought we would celebrate what has been traditionally a **very** major feast on the Church's Kalendar. Indeed, if one were to look into the Anglican Breviary, the full-scale monastic book used by some clergy and religious who wish to say all or some of the traditional **eight** daily offices, one might find that the Assumption ranks up there with the Feast of the Holy Trinity, slightly above the Transfiguration itself.

The feast has lost some of its popularity since the Reformation. Many Protestant denominations do not recognize it, regarding it as “one of those **Popish** things” which lacks a solely Scriptural basis. Indeed, while it is not directly in the Bible, it began appearing in

various non-canonical narratives, such as *The Book of Mary's Repose* as early as the Fourth Century. In the American RC church in many dioceses today the Assumption is still a “Day of Obligation” because it has been moved to be celebrated only on Sundays which always is a day of obligation for all Christians. Conversely, the Episcopal Church did, with its 1979 Prayer Book, restore the Assumption as a recognized Feast Day, although they placed in their supplementary liturgy book known as, “**Lesser Feasts and Fasts**”.

Yet, to see the Assumption as a silly or strictly medieval RC holy day is mistaken. It is also a day of obligation throughout the entire Orthodox world where it is known as the Dormition of the Theotokos or the Falling Asleep of the God Bearer. In other parts of the Roman world it also **still** is regarded as not only a day of obligation even if it occurs during the week, but also treated as a holiday from work with everything shutting down as we do on Christmas. A partial list of not particularly Orthodox nations and states where one would “have the day off” from work includes: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Croatia, Cyprus, East Timor, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Tahiti, Togo, parts of Canada and two states of Germany, the Saarland and Bavaria. If one includes the **Orthodox** world one would see that it is celebrated still today as a major religious occasion throughout most of the world.

So what is the belief behind the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and why is that important to us today in the 21st Century? First, the universal Church believes that Mary is in heaven, although there is some disagreement as to whether she is Queen or Queen Mother. Regardless, she is “higher than the cherubim, more glorious than the seraphim”.

Further, the Church's belief whether it be Orthodox, RC, or Anglican, is that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven after her life ended here on earth. While this might sound

incredible upon hearing, there is definite Biblical precedent for such an occurrence. We need to keep in mind that in the Second Chapter of the Second Book of Kings the prophet Elijah is taken from Elisha's presence by being caught up to heaven in a whirlwind. Also, in the non-canonical OT Book of Enoch relates that Enoch (Noah's great-grandfather) was so good that he simply walked into heaven. Finally, while not a bodily assumption such as Enoch's or Elijah's, Moses had the unique distinction in human history of being personally buried by God himself.

This teaching of Mary as also having been bodily assumed into heaven was well established throughout all of Christendom by the Seventh Century, including in the *Oriental* Orthodox world which already had separated themselves in previous centuries after the first three Ecumenical Councils. For Romans the Assumption of Mary has become a matter of dogma, a level which both the Orthodox and Anglican world have not signed onto since it can not be undeniably deduced from scripture alone.

There is also some disagreement as to the **timing** of the actual Assumption. The Eastern Orthodox believe more that this assumption of her body and soul happened three days after her physical death. Yet, in Pope Pius XII's statement in 1950 declaring belief in Mary's Assumption to be **dogma** he wrote somewhat vaguely that the assumption of Mary's body and soul occurred after "having completed the course of her earthly life".

Traditionally Catholics have believed that Mary, unlike her son, did not really taste death but was taken by angels at the moment of death to heaven. This is based in part upon the theology that as the temple of life, as Jesus' mother, she could not suffer death, as St. John of Damascus held. While this is the traditional Roman view, many Catholics in good standing today hold with the Orthodox view that Mary actually died but was assumed on the third day, like her son, before her body would have begun to suffer corruption. Again Pope Pius XII's

declaration would seem to allow this to be permissible.

What about the Anglican Realm? Our founding bishop, Abp. Morse, likes to point out that he very much believes in the Assumption of Mary into heaven for many, many reasons. One important reason is that unlike any other saint, no person or parish ever has claimed to have any relic of Mary, such a bone from her body. Throughout Church history the bones of its saints have been reverently divided and given to parishes to be placed into the Mensa or altar stone over which the Consecration occurs.

Yet, we in the Province of Christ the King and the other Continuing Anglican Churches have not gone so far as the Vatican as to decree belief in the Assumption as something necessary to be a good Anglican. But we certainly embrace the apparent Roman view that as to **when** the Assumption happened is open to debate. Thus our Propers today from our Missal, that is the Lessons and various other sentences read or chanted such as the *Introit*, are drawn from **both** the Orthodox liturgy and from the pre-Vatican II liturgy. This openness is consistent with the belief which Anglicans embrace that the **moment** of Mary's assumption is not as important as what it means to Christians.

Mary's entry into heaven has several important messages for us and all people today. The undivided Church has viewed her Assumption, while not specifically referenced in the Bible, as being the first display of the promise about the end of time from the Book of Revelation and Christ's **own** promise to his disciples in the Gospel of John.

Regarding Revelation, with Mary's assumption being of body **and** soul we have manifested what Revelation teaches about the end of time, namely, that those who are saved will be united in body and soul. As to the Gospel of John, we should remember that as the moment of his Passion neared Jesus promised his Apostles that there are “many mansions” in

heaven. He told them that he would “go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” These words of paradise provide great comfort to mourners at funerals. Thus, this passage frequently is chosen by many as a lesson for the Burial Office in our PB.

But, beyond the display of Christ's promise of paradise as well as the promise from Revelation of the ultimate union again of our own bodies and souls in heaven, Mary's assumption also displays... that she was indeed a very virtuous woman. She was not just Jesus' mother, not just a loving mom to the Son of God.

Nearness to Jesus, as St. John Chrysostom explained about the Assumption, profits a man nothing. If nearness to Christ in and of himself could get one to heaven, then nearness to Christ by those in Palestine would have profited them. Yet, despite being fellow Jews and seeing, hearing, and touching Jesus, they turned their backs on him over and over again and then defiantly at the end. If nearness to Christ in and of himself helped one, then Jerusalem, where the Ark of the Covenant once had been along with the glory of God, and the city Jesus had visited often, wept over, and where he taught and where he died, would have been spared from its utter and complete destruction forty years after his death.

Thus, being in the presence of Christ in and of himself is not a ticket to heaven. Likewise, being in church every Sunday also is not a ticket to heaven. Neither can one win such a ticket just by being a good person, a good brother, or good sister, or even being a very loving parent. Nearness to Christ is the start, we must choose “the better part”, as Mary the sister of Martha chose in our Gospel today. Martha wanted to prepare a feast for Jesus, Mary was feasting on Jesus' words. She was choosing to be fed by him.

Living on Jesus' words, taking them inside ourselves and digesting them, will change us

and make us into more virtuous people: one motivated by love of Jesus to do good works. All the NT authors and Church fathers point out that it is **belief** in Jesus as God's son as *displayed* in good works, the fruits of such faith, which lead to salvation. Thus, the Virgin Mary was saved and assumed into heaven **not** because she simply was Jesus' mother, nor because she was even a loving parent, but because she believed that he, while **her** son, was also God's son AND produced the good works of faith which came from that belief.

Mary's faith was on display from the beginning where, unlike Eve saying “yes” to the serpent, Mary said yes to the angel which led to her singing the Magnificat which we heard in today's Gospel. Thus began the *good work* of... being Jesus' mother. While the Bible does not record all her other good works of faith, they obviously were known by her son and continued to be recognized in heaven after his death.

This is a point we must always remember when temptation leads us to think that doing something good is useless or we ask in despair, “who will notice?!” Obviously as we learn from Mary's Assumption that **heaven** notices. So, let us rejoice today in the display of the promise that our souls and bodies will be reunited in paradise and remember that our good works are noticed at least by those in heaven if not by others on earth. Let us choose to be fed and nourished daily by Jesus, not just in Sunday church attendance, but daily prayer and holy reading that we may grow in faith and good works. For as we grow in faith and good works we can look **forward** to “falling asleep” and waking up in that mansion into which the Lord wants to receive us. When that occurs we then will be partakers, as our Collect for Trinity XI put it, of “thy heavenly treasure”. Amen.

+