

Pope Pius XII's Proclamation on Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary

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And so, to cite some other examples, St. Germain of Constantinople considered the fact that the body of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, was incorrupt and had been taken up into heaven to be in keeping, not only with her divine motherhood, but also with the special holiness of her virginal body. "Thou art she who, as it is written, appearest in beauty, and thy virginal body is all holy, all chaste, entirely the dwelling place of God, so that it is henceforth completely exempt from dissolution into dust. Though still human, it is changed into the heavenly life of incorruptibility, truly living and glorious, undamaged and sharing in perfect life." (18)

And another very ancient writer asserts: "As the most glorious Mother of Christ, our Saviour and God and the giver of life and immortality, has been endowed with life by Him, she has received an eternal incorruptibility of the body together with Him Who has raised her up from the tomb and has taken her up to Himself in a way known only to Him." (19)

When this liturgical feast was being celebrated ever more widely and with ever increasing devotion and piety, the Bishops of the Church and its preachers in continually greater numbers considered it their duty openly and clearly to explain the mystery that the feast commemorates, and to explain how it is intimately connected with the other revealed truths.

The Scholastic Theologians
Among the scholastic theologians there have been many who, wishing to inquire more profoundly into divinely revealed truths and desirous of showing the harmony that exists between what is termed the theological demonstration and the Catholic faith, have always considered it worthy of note that this privilege of the Virgin Mary's Assumption is in wonderful accord with those divine truths given us in Holy Scripture.

When they go on to explain this point, they adduce various proofs to throw light on this privilege of Mary. As the first element of these demonstrations they insist upon the fact that, out of filial love for His Mother, Jesus Christ has willed that she be assumed into heaven. They base the strength of their proofs on the incomparable dignity of her divine motherhood and of all those prerogatives which follow from it. These include her exalted holiness, entirely surpassing the sanctity of all men and and of all the angels, the intimate union of Mary with her Son, and the affection of pre-eminent love which the Son has for His most worthy Mother.

Sacred Scripture

Often there are theologians and preachers who, following in the footsteps of the holy Fathers, (20) have been rather free in their use of events and expressions taken from Sacred Scripture to explain their belief in the Assumption. Thus, to mention a few of the texts frequently cited in this fashion, some have employed the words of the Psalmist: "Ariae, O Lord, into thy resting place: thou and the ark, which thou hast sanctified"; (21) and have looked upon the Ark of the Covenant as a figure of the most pure body of the Virgin Mary, preserved and exempted from all the corruption of the tomb and raised up to such glory in heaven.

Treating of this subject, they also describe her as the Queen, entering triumphantly into the royal halls of heaven and sitting at the right hand of the divine Redeemer. (22) Likewise they mention the Spouse



A vast multitude, representing hundreds of thousands from the four corners of the globe, gathered in St. Peter's Square, Rome, on November 1, to hear Pope Pius XII proclaim the solemn definition of the Dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. His Holiness is shown borne aloft in the procession to the Basilica, while the faithful loudly cheered: "Viva Il Papa! Viva L'Assunta!" (NC Photos)



At a semi-private consistory, in the presence of 28 Cardinals and more than 600 bishops, His Holiness Pope Pius XII reads his homily outlining the reasons why he should proclaim as Catholic dogma that the Virgin Mary was "assumed body and soul into the glory of Heaven." The reading of the homily preceded the formal public proclamation by two days. This is a radio photo. (NC Photos)

of the Canticles "that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, or myrrh and frankincense" to be crowned. (23) These are proposed as depicting that heavenly Queen and heavenly Spouse who has been lifted up to the courts of heaven with the divine Bridegroom.

Moreover, the scholastic Doctors have recognized the Assumption of the Virgin Mother of God as something signified, not only in various figures of the Old Testament, but also in that Woman clothed with the Sun, whom John the Apostle contemplated on the Island of Patmos. (24) Similarly they have given special attention to those words of the New Testament: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women." (25) Also they saw, in the mystery of the Assumption, the fulfillment of that most joyful verse: "I will glorify the place of my feet" (27) he said. It is certain that the divine Redeemer had descended with supreme glory His most beloved Mother from whom He had received human flesh. He asserts that "you have here a clear statement that the Blessed Virgin has been assumed in her body, which was the place of the

body has been corrupted—because it was really united again to her soul and, together with it, crowned with great glory in the heavenly courts. "For she was filled with grace and blessed among women. She alone merited to conceive the true God of true God, Whom as a virgin, she brought forth, to Whom she gave milk, fondling Him upon her breasts, and in all things she waited upon Him with reverent care." (28)

St. Anthony of Padua

Among the holy writers who at that time employed statements and various images and analogies of Sacred Scripture to illustrate and to confirm the doctrine of the Assumption, which they piously believed, the Evangelical Doctor St. Anthony of Padua holds a special place. On the feast day of the Assumption, while explaining the Prophet's words: "I will glorify the place of my feet" (27) he said. It is certain that the divine Redeemer had descended with supreme glory His most beloved Mother from whom He had received human flesh. He asserts that "you have here a clear statement that the Blessed Virgin has been assumed in her body, which was the place of the

Lord's feet. Hence it is that the holy Psalmist writes: "Ariae, O Lord, into thy resting place: thou and the ark which thou hast sanctified." And he asserts that, just as Jesus Christ has risen from the death over which He triumphed and has ascended to the right hand of the Father, so likewise the ark of His sanctification "has risen up, since on this day the Virgin Mother has been taken up to her heavenly dwelling." (28)

When, during the middle ages, scholastic theology was especially flourishing, St. Albert the Great who to establish this teaching had gathered together many proofs from Sacred Scripture, from the statements of older writers, and finally from the liturgy and from what is known as theological reasoning, concluded in this way: "From these proofs and authorities and from many others, it is manifest that the most blessed Mother of God has been assumed above the choirs of angels. And this we believe in every way to be true." (29)

And, in a sermon which he delivered on the sacred day of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Assumption, explaining the words "Hail, full of grace," addressed her, the Universal Doctor, comparing the Blessed Virgin with Eve, stated clearly and insistently that she was exempted from the fourfold curse that had been laid upon Eve. (30)

Following the footsteps of his distinguished teacher, St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, despite the fact that he never dealt directly with this question, nevertheless, whenever he touched upon it, always held, together with the Catholic Church, that Mary's body had been assumed into heaven along with her soul. (31)

St. Bonaventura

Along with many others, St. Bonaventura, the Seraphic Doctor, held the same views. He considered it as entirely certain that, as God had preserved the Most Holy Virgin Mary from the violation of her virginal purity and integrity in conceiving and in childbirth, He would never have permitted her body to have been reserved into dust and ashes. (32)

Explaining these words of Sacred Scripture: "Who is like that cometh up from the desert,"

flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved." (33) and applying them in a kind of accommodated sense to the Blessed Virgin, he reasons thus: "From this we can see that also in her body . . . her blood veins would not have been complete unless she were there as a person. The soul is not a person, but the soul, joined to the body, is a person. It is manifest that she is there in soul and in body. Otherwise she would not possess her complete beatitude." (34)

In the Fifteenth Century, during a later period of scholastic theology, St. Bernardine of Siena collected and diligently evaluated all that the medieval theologians had said and taught on this question. He was not content with setting down the principal considerations which these writers of an earlier day had already expressed, but he added others of his own. The likeness between God's Mother and her divine Son, in the way of nobility and dignity of body and of soul—a likeness that forbids us to think of the heavenly Queen as being separated from the heavenly King—makes it especially imperative that Christ "should be only where Christ is." (35)

Moreover, it is reasonable and fitting that not only the soul and body of a man, but also the soul and body of a woman should have obtained heavenly glory. Finally, since the Church has never looked for the bodily relics of the Blessed Virgin nor proposed them for the veneration of the people, we have a proof on the order of a sensible experience. (36)

The above-mentioned teachings of the holy Fathers and of the Doctors have been in common use during more recent times. Gathering together the testimonies of the Christians of earlier days, St. Robert Bellarmine exclaimed: "And who, I ask, could believe that the ark of holiness, the dwelling place of the Word of God, the temple of the Holy Ghost, could be reduced to ruin? My soul is filled with horror at the thought that the virginal flesh which had begotten God, had brought Him into the world, had nourished and carried Him, could have been turned into ashes or given over to be food for worms." (37)

In like manner, St. Francis of Sales, after asserting that it is wrong to doubt that Jesus Christ has Himself observed, in the most perfect way, the divine commandment by which children are ordered to honor their parents, asks this question: "What can would not bring his mother back to life, and would not bring her into paradise after her death, if he could?" (38) And St. Alphonsus writes that "Jesus did not wish to have the body of Mary corrupted after death, since she would have descended to her own dishonor to have her virginal flesh, from which He Himself had assumed flesh, reduced to dust." (39)

The Church's Faith

Once the mystery which is commemorated in this feast had been placed in its proper light, there were many teachers who, instead of dealing with the theological reasoning that show why it is fitting and right to believe the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven, chose to focus their mind and attention on the faith of the Church itself, which is the Mystical Body of Christ without stain or spot (40) and is called by the Apostle "the pillar and ground of truth." (41) Relying on this common faith, they

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word of God or in the Church, either in its ordinary or in its extraordinary teaching, a divinely revealed truth must be believed." (4)

Various testimonies and signs of the most belief of the Church evident from remote times and signs of it down through the centuries; and this can become more clearly from day to day.

Christ's faithful, the teaching and the sign of their pastor learned from the signs that the Virgin Mary, out of the course of her pilgrimage, led a life by cares, hardships, and that, moreover, the holy old man Sim foretold actually came that is, that a terrible sword had pierced her, she stood under the her divine Son, our Re

In the same way, it difficult for them to that the great Mother like her only begotten actually passed from I. But this in no way pi them from believing a professing openly th sacred body had ne subject to the corruptio tomb, and that augu nate of the Divine W never been reduced to ashes.

Evidence of Faith

The innumerable which have been dedic the Virgin Mary assur heaven clearly attest th do those sacred ima posed everywhere for ti ration of the faithful, bring this unique triu the Blessed Virgin be eyes of all men. In cities, dioceses, and in regions have been plac the special patrona guardianship of the Mother of God assum heaven.

In the same way, r institutes, with the app the Church, have been and have taken their from this privilege. N "We pass over in silen



HOLY FATHER