

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

(Continued from Page 26)
word of God or in tradition, and which are proposed by the Church, either in solemn judgment or in its ordinary and universal teaching office, as divinely revealed truths which must be believed." (9)

Various testimonies, indications and signs of this common belief of the Church are evident from remote times down through the course of the centuries; and this same belief becomes more clearly manifest from day to day.

Christ's faithful, through the teaching and the leadership of their pastors, have learned from the sacred books that the Virgin Mary, throughout the course of her earthly pilgrimage, led a life troubled by cares, hardships, and sorrows, and that, moreover, what the holy old man Simeon had foretold actually came to pass, that is, that a terribly sharp sword had pierced her heart as she stood under the cross of her divine Son, our Redeemer.

In the same way, it was not difficult for them to affirm that the great Mother of God, like her only begotten Son, had actually passed from this life. But this in no way prevented them from believing and from professing openly that her sacred body had never been subject to the corruption of the tomb, and that august tabernacle of the Divine Word had never been reduced to dust and ashes.

Actually, enlightened by divine grace and moved by affection for her, God's Mother and our own sweetest Mother, they have contemplated in an ever clearer light the wonderful harmony and order of those privileges which the most provident God has lavished upon this revered associate of our Redeemer, privileges which reach such an exalted plane, that except for her, nothing created by God other than the human nature of Jesus Christ has ever reached this level.

Evidences of Faith
The innumerable temples which have been dedicated to the Virgin Mary assumed into heaven clearly attest this faith. So do those sacred images, exposed everywhere for the veneration of the faithful, which bring this unique triumph of the Blessed Virgin before the eyes of all men. Moreover, cities, dioceses, and individual regions have been placed under the special patronage and guardianship of the Virgin Mother of God assumed into heaven.

In the same way, religious institutes, with the approval of the Church, have been founded and have taken their name from this privilege. Nor can we pass over in silence the

fact that in the Rosary of Mary, the recitation of which this Apostle sees so urgently recommends, there is one mystery proposed for pious meditation which, as all know, deals with the Blessed Virgin's Assumption into heaven.

This belief of the sacred pastors and of Christ's faithful is manifested still more universally and splendidly by the fact that, since ancient times, there have been both in the East and in the West solemn liturgical offices commemorating this privilege. The holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church have never failed to draw enlightenment from this fact since, as everyone knows, the sacred liturgy, "because it is the profession, subject to the supreme teaching authority within the Church, of heavenly truths, can supply proofs and testimonies of no small value for deciding any individual point of Christian doctrine." (10)

In the liturgical books which deal with the feast either of the Dormition or of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin there are expressions that agree in testifying that, when the Virgin Mother of God passed from this earthly exile to heaven, what happened to her sacred body was, by the decree of divine providence, in keeping with the dignity of the Mother of the Word Incarnate, and with the other privileges she had been accorded.

Thus to cite an illustrious example, this is set forth in that Sacramentary which Adrian I, Our predecessor of immortal memory, sent to the Emperor Charlemagne. These words are found in this volume: "Venerable to us, O Lord, is the festivity of this day on which the holy Mother of God suffered temporal death, but still could not be kept down by the bonds of death, who has begotten Thy Son Our Lord incarnate from herself." (11)

Ancient Liturgies
What is here indicated in that sobriety characteristic of the Roman liturgy is presented more clearly and completely in other ancient liturgical books. To take one as an example, the Gallican Sacramentary designates this privilege of Mary's as "a sacrament beyond description," all the more worthy of being preached as the Virgin's Assumption is something unique among men.

And, in the Byzantine liturgy, not only is the Virgin Mary's bodily Assumption connected, time and time again, with the dignity of the Mother of God, but also with the other privileges, and in particular with the virginal motherhood granted her by a singular decree of God's providence. "God, the King of the universe, has



ASSUMPTION OF BLESSED VIRGIN

granted these favors that surpass nature. As He kept the virgin in childbirth, thus He has kept thy body incorrupt in the tomb and has glorified it by His divine act of transferring it from the tomb." (12)

The fact that the Apostle See, which has inherited the function entrusted to the Prince of the Apostles, the function of confirming the brethren in the faith, (13) has by its own authority, made the celebration of this feast ever more solemn, has certainly and effectively moved the attentive minds of the faithful to appreciate always more completely the magnitude of the mystery it commemorates.

So it was that the feast of the Assumption was elevated from that rank which it had occupied from the beginning among the other Marian feasts to be classed among the more solemn celebrations of the entire liturgical cycle. And, when

Our predecessor St. Sergius I prescribed what is known as the litany, or the stational procession, to be held on the four Marian feasts, he specified, along with the feast of the Nativity, those of the Annunciation, the Purification, and the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. (14)

Again, St. Leo IV saw to it that the feast, which was already being celebrated under the title of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother of God, should be observed in even a more solemn way when he ordered a vigil to be held on the day before it and afterwards prescribed prayers on the octave day. When this had been done, he decided to take part himself in the celebration, in the midst of a great multitude of the faithful. (15) Moreover, the fact that a holy fast had been ordered from ancient times for the day prior to the feast is made very evident by what

Our predecessor St. Nicholas I testifies in treating of the principal feasts which "the Holy Roman Church has observed for a long time, and still observes." (16)

The Fathers and Doctors

However, since the liturgy of the Church does not engender the Catholic faith, but rather springs from it, in such a way that the practices of the sacred worship proceed from the Faith as the fruit comes from the tree, it follows that the holy Fathers and the great Doctors, in the homilies and sermons they gave the people on this feast day, did not draw their teaching from the feast itself as from a primary source, but rather they spoke of this doctrine as something already known and accepted by Christ's faithful. They presented it more clearly. They offered more profound explanation of its meaning and nature, bringing out into sharper light the fact that this feast shows, not only the dead body of the Blessed Virgin Mary remained incorrupt, but that she gained a triumph out of death, her heavenly glorification after the example of her begotten Son, Jesus Christ; truths that the liturgical books had frequently touched upon only briefly and in passing.

Thus St. John Damascene, an outstanding herald of this traditional truth, spoke out with powerful eloquence when he compared the bodily Assumption of the revered Mother of God with her other prerogatives and privileges. "It was fitting that she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. It was fitting that she, who had carried the Creator as a child in her breast, should dwell in the divine tabernacles. It was fitting that the spouse, whom the Father had taken to Himself, should live in the divine mansions. It was fitting that she, who had seen her Son upon the cross and who had thereby received into her heart the sword of sorrow which she had escaped in the act of giving birth to Him should look upon Him as He sits at the right hand of the Father. It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son, and that she should be honored by every creature as the Mother and as the Handmaid of God." (17)

These words of St. John Damascene agree perfectly with what others have taught on this same subject. Statements no less clear and accurate are to be found in sermons delivered by Fathers of an earlier time or of the same period, particularly on the occasion of this feast.

(Continued on Page 27)



HOLY FATHER DECLARES MARY'S ASSUMPTION & DOGMA OF FAITH BEFORE A CROWD OF 500,000 IN ST. PETER'S SQUARE