

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 1:39-56; (R1) Rv. 11:19, 12:1-6, 10; (R2) 1 Cor. 15: 20-26.

The theme for the feast of the Assumption is victory—victory over sin and death. The first reading closes on a note of victory: "Now have salvation and power come."

For some Catholics the proclamation in 1950 of the dogma of the Assumption seemed inopportune in the context of ecumenism. Some even regretted the definition as offensive to Protestants who often seem ill at ease when honor is conferred on her whom God Himself has honored as no human creature can ever honor.

The dogma of the Assumption is not just another glorious title added to the accepted privileges of Mary. The dogma has a definite role to play in salvation history. What this world needs today are positive answers about death and the hereafter.

Paul had to contend with Plato-permeated Greeks, who thought the body to be the prison of the soul and death to be a liberation from the corruptible body. He defended the Jewish concept that man is not just a compound of body and soul, but a unified person, and death is not a dissolution of a unity, but a permanentizing of an entity meant always to be one person.

Today, we have to contend with the other extreme: the deification of the body. The Assumption teaches that eternal youth and beauty are to be won by following the path of the Virgin Mary—the woman clothed with the sun, whose children conquer the Dragon.

At first I wondered why the visitation story was selected as the gospel for the Assumption. It becomes clear if we consider Mary under her title "Ark of the Covenant."

In the Old Testament the Ark was a small (3'9" by 2'3") portable wooden box, gold-gilded. In it were the ten commandments. Over it hovered a cloud, the shechinah, symbol of God's presence among

His people. As long as Israel kept the covenant, God was with His people. The Ark was carried at the head of the column when the Hebrews traveled through the desert and before the army when it went into battle. The Ark connoted war and victory.

When David became king, he sought to strengthen the unity of his people by bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. On the way, one of the porters dropped dead when he tried to steady the Ark from tipping (2 S 6:2ff). In fear, David stationed the Ark in the house of Obed-Edom for three months. When the Ark blessed the house of Obed-Edom, David brought it to the City.

After Mary had consented to Gabriel's message, the Spirit of the Most High overshadowed her. In her heart she carried God's law and in her womb His Son. She became in truth the real Ark of the Covenant. In visiting Elizabeth, St. Luke saw Mary as bringing the Ark to Judah. He saw this as the beginning of the war with sin and death. Elizabeth's greeting, words taken from the victory songs of Israel's warrior women, presaged victory. Mary stayed with Elizabeth three months, blessing her house. After Jesus had been born, she brought Him to the City to present to God her Lamb who was to take away the sins of the world.

In other words, Mary, the Ark of the Covenant, inaugurated the Messianic era, sounding the death-knell of sin and death. Her Assumption assures us that this is so; that she, the first of believers, here and now, is enjoying definitive victory over death, which affects the body as well as the soul.

Mary's response is her song of victory: the Magnificat.

NEW AUXILIARY

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — Msgr. James C. Timlin, chancellor of the Scranton, Pa., Roman Catholic diocese, has been named auxiliary to Bishop J. Carroll McCormick of Scranton and titular bishop of Gunago.

Prayer of the Faithful

By Father Robert F. McNamara

When you prepare to take some medicine, or assemble a model airplane, or drive your new car away, you are (or should be) careful to read the directions given on the label, on the box, or in the driver's manual.

The Eucharistic Liturgy set down in the Sacramentary is official and has the backing of church law. So that it may be celebrated properly, Vatican authorities provided it with a "driver's manual," the General Instruction printed in the first pages of the book. From now on, when problems arise of what to do, what not to do, and what else to do, we should first turn to this driver's manual.

Let's see, for instance, what the General Instruction says about the General Intercessions (which we also know by the name of the Prayer of the Faithful.) We have become pretty well accustomed to these by now, and I think we all appreciate them. They are most appreciated, perhaps, in small group Masses, when each person can formulate his or her own particular intention.

General Instruction 45 addresses itself to this community prayer, and gives an interesting insight into its importance. In this prayer, it says, "the people exercise their priestly function by interceding for all mankind." Intercession is a priestly function. In the Prayer of the Faithful the members of the common priesthood join the member or members of the ministerial priesthood in petitions for human needs.

You have probably noticed that the Prayer of the Faithful follows a certain pattern. This is so that all the basic needs of the people will receive some sort of attention. The normal order of intentions is: 1) the needs of the Church; 2) for public authorities and the salvation of the world; 3) for those oppressed by any need; 4) for the local community; the congregation; those present, etc. There is a wide

variety of intentions that can be remembered under each of these headings. In some parishes, use is made of "canned" Sunday intentions provided in missalettes. So long as these are relevant, using them is all right; but one should not be shackled by the formulas. They can be changed at will, and it is important to add to them other intentions of special urgency in the parish itself. Other parishes compose their own, and this is better. Here the parish worship committee can make a worthwhile contribution.

The Prayer of the Faithful becomes a little more specialized on particular occasions like weddings, confirmations, funerals, and at Masses for special groups.

The General Instruction adds another recommendation that most parishes have overlooked: "It is appropriate that this prayer be included in all Masses celebrated with a congregation." (No. 45)

You may say, "People who attend daily Mass more often than not have only a half-hour available." That makes no difference with the Prayer of the Faithful. At weekday Masses it can be shortened, maybe to four brief intentions: 1) the Church or particular leaders; 2) civil officials or bodies, or some legislative need; 3) the starving, the oppressed, the poor, or the victimized; 4) the sick or deceased of the parish (including those for whom the Mass is offered) or some urgent local need.

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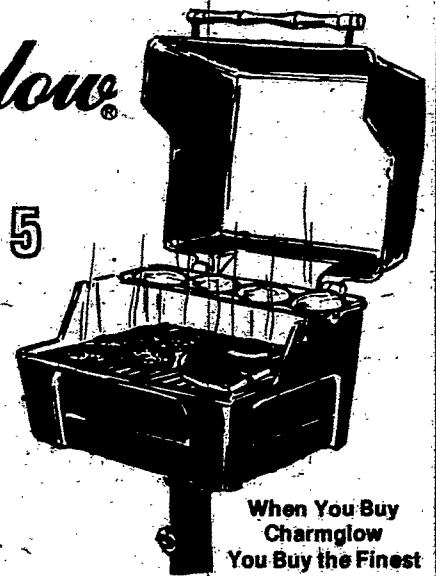
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