

Assumption is belief, not fact

Q. As a Catholic I believe what the church teaches about the assumption of Mary. But I never learned any facts upon which this teaching is based. How can we have such an important feast and belief when there are no facts to back them up? Or have I missed something? (Indiana)

A. I'm not sure what you mean by facts. For many of our Catholic and Christian beliefs there are no physical "facts," if that's what you mean, to support them. What such facts do we have to bolster our faith in the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist, for example? Or our belief that the Bible is the word of God?

These are mysteries in the formal religious sense; we cannot know or comprehend them with our human faculties alone, without some direct revelation from God.

What Pope Pius XII wrote when proclaiming the dogma of the assumption (1950) applies to all divine mysteries. The virgin Mary's bodily assumption into heaven, he said, is a truth "which surely no faculty of the human mind could know by its own natural powers" (*Munificentissimus Deus*, No. 14).

We believe that some authentic facts, realities, are not certifiable by physical evidence or purely natural processes of logic. Among these is the promise of Jesus Christ that he would be with and guide his community of believers, his church, until the end of time (Mt 28:20).

He assured the disciples that the Father would send the Spirit of truth, who "will teach you everything and remind you of all I told you" and "will guide you to all truth" (Jn 14:26 and 16:13).

We, as all Christians from the beginning, take those promises seriously. It doesn't mean the church never will make a mistake or that it will be perfect. Made up of imperfect and sinful human beings from the top down, it could not be otherwise.

It does mean, however, that the Spirit of Jesus will keep it safe from any direction or teaching that could get it seriously off track and endanger its mission to be a sure instrument and channel of God's saving grace for the human family. This is an essential "fact" of Catholic, and indeed all Christian, faith.

This leads to the further fact that, while the church speaks sometimes through the pope or the collective body of bishops, the official teach-



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Bridging Gaps

ers in the church, the Holy Spirit also inspires, and speaks to and in, the whole body of the faithful on earth, bringing about what is known in theology as the *sensus fidelium*, the consensus of believers.

Pius XII's declaration of the doctrine of the assumption is a perfect example. Before the operative words proclaiming the dogma, he devotes pages to explaining carefully exactly what is being done and especially establishing the extensive, centuries-old belief of Catholics worldwide that this teaching regarding Mary was revealed by God.

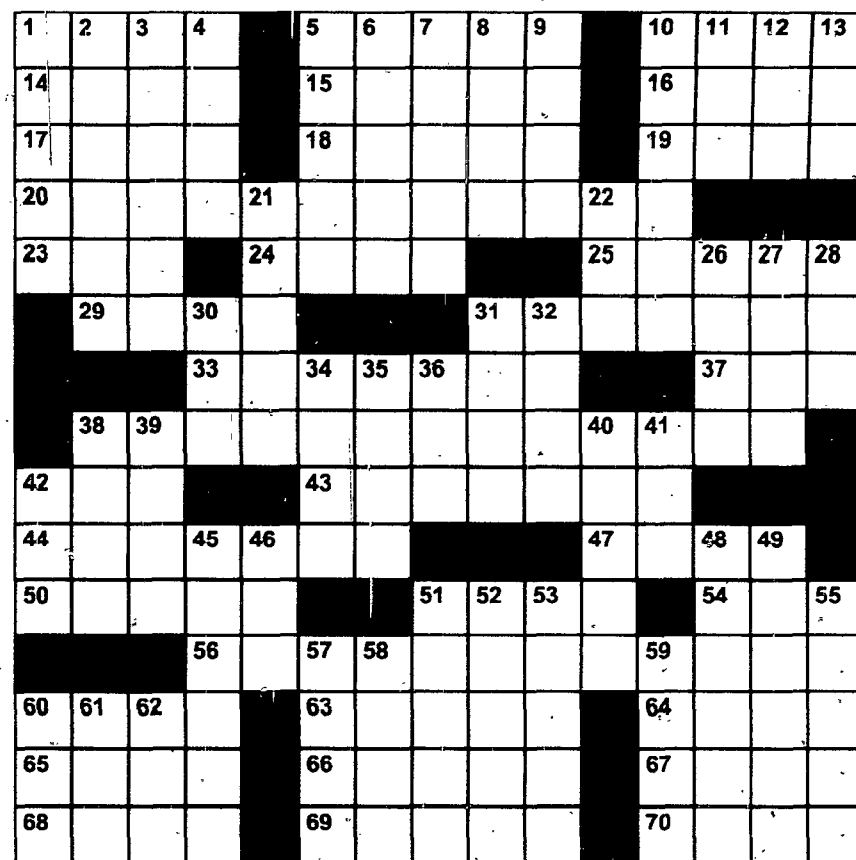
He reviews evidence of this belief in devotions and liturgy, in the dedication of churches, religious orders and every sort of religious institution and activity to our Lady under the title of her assumption.

He explains how the teaching accords with Scripture and other great Christian traditions, and why, for more than 1,000 years, theologians, including St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas, witnessed in its favor. (If you want to read the whole document, Google search *Munificentissimus Deus* on the Internet.)

Finally, four years before the declaration, he wrote to all bishops, inquiring whether the assumption could be proposed and defined as a dogma of faith. "Do you, with your clergy and people, desire that it should be (defined)?" he asked. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Perhaps, especially dealing with things of God, "facts" are where you find them. As with love, God, beauty and nearly all other truly important facts of life, we do not understand. We just know.

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Catholic Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 "There is a _____ in Gilead" (hymn)
- 5 _____ Coeur
- 10 Sunday before Easter
- 14 Type of rug
- 15 Mythological guardian of Crete
- 16 Saint of Lima
- 17 One mop or one piano tune
- 18 Cookies
- 19 Robert or Alan
- 20 Catholic group founded in Ireland in the 1920's
- 23 German city
- 24 Not a red one
- 25 Computer question
- 29 Country singer McIntyre
- 31 Lingered
- 33 "_____ the sleep of the just." (1 Sm 2:8)
- 37 Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on _____ this animal in John's Gospel
- 38 Papal title
- 42 Stock traders' org
- 43 He chased Lucifer out of heaven
- 44 Northerly wind
- 47 How the runner got home
- 50 Newsboy's cry
- 51 Opera highlight

- 54 New prefix
- 56 "One, holy, Catholic _____"
- 60 Spoke
- 63 Sign up
- 64 "Though you build your _____ high as the eagle" (Jer 49:16)
- 65 Michele's friend
- 66 Parsley plant
- 67 Major ending
- 68 Elevator man
- 69 Blockheads
- 70 Not the pastor (abbr.)

DOWN

- 1 Biblical gods
- 2 Late on an obligation, with "in" (var.)
- 3 A _____ of Their Own
- 4 There were three
- 5 "The _____ which the builders rejected" (Lk 20:17)
- 6 Brother of Moses
- 7 Fissure
- 8 The disciples went to _____ an upper one
- 9 Italian she
- 10 It has power
- 11 Internet co
- 12 "Hallucinogen" (abbr.)
- 13 _____ culpa
- 21 Florida city
- 22 Postal abbreviation
- 26 Spanish aunts

- 27 What the Sabbath is a day of
- 28 9 ft make 3 of these
- 30 English TV station
- 31 Sometimes it's high
- 32 Zoroastrianism's principle of order
- 34 Ms Bombeck
- 35 Dirt
- 36 Mil rank
- 38 Type of engine
- 39 Superlative ending
- 40 Took a chair again
- 41 Under the weather
- 42 Prot Denomination
- 45 Carpenter and fisherman
- 46 Jogged
- 48 Small bays
- 49 Believers in a "Master Clockmaker" God
- 51 Possible Easter month
- 52 What the chicks come home to do
- 53 Emerald and Capri
- 55 Eight singers
- 57 "_____ faith without good works is _____" (Jas 2:26)
- 58 _____ Domini
- 59 Draft brd designation
- 60 _____ Paulo
- 61 Tsp or TB
- 62 Selfish Juan's exclamation?

Answers on page 9 (No. 31)