

EIN HARGLWYDDES SEREN Y MÔR OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA LLANDUDNO

35 LLOYD STREET. LL30 2YA

SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2009

**may we know Christ more clearly
love him more dearly
and follow him more nearly**

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Dear Parishioner,

On this feast of our Lady's Assumption, I would like to take you behind the scenes of the celebration and show you how this Feast came to be celebrated throughout the Church.

It was only in 1950 that the Assumption of Our Lady became a dogma of the Catholic Church, only from then on was it officially part of the series of truths a Catholic is expected to believe.

So, what does that mean? that it is an upstart doctrine?; that it is an addition to the Faith? that it is a second-rate, questionable part of our Catholic inheritance?

Our Lord promised the Holy Spirit to his Church, "the Spirit of Truth, who will lead you into all truth" he said. This was a very solemn promise made by Christ to his Church, and we know that Christ can never break his word.

The Apostles and some of the early Christians actually wit-

nessed Mary's death (or departure from this life). Naturally this information became part of what they passed on to the rising generation. Each generation passed this on to the next, together with everything else they did and believed as Christians. This passing on of the Christian "thing" we call "Tradition". From the outset, it has always been part of the Tradition of the Church that Mary was assumed into heaven.

There is not much written evidence about what the Church did or believed in the first couple of centuries, but by the time of the great Bishop Fathers of the Church in the third century and onwards we find the Tradition of Our Lady's Assumption very much alive.

Some of the Fathers believed that Our Lady died before she was taken up to heaven; others that she was assumed into heaven before she died. All bore common

witness to the fact that the Apostles had been present at the end of her life.

Common in many parts of the Church was the feast of Mary's Dormition or "Falling Asleep", which implied a belief that she died a natural death first. In some places there was a feast of her death and another of her Assumption.

The Orthodox Church in the East teaches that the Virgin Mary died a fully human death before being assumed. They tell a lovely story of how Thomas was late for Our Lady's funeral, just as he was late for Our Lord's resurrection. The other Apostles were Our Lady's pall bearers, but not he. He was three days late, to be precise, and when he arrived he asked to be allowed to see her body. But when they took him there, the grave was empty and the body had already been taken up into heaven.

The Protestant Church has steadfastly rejected the Assumption of Mary, and threw the baby out

with the bath water as they did with many other things. They rejected it because it is not stated explicitly in the Scriptures, though a very clear reference to Mary clothed with the sun is in that chapter of the Apocalypse (12:1-6) which is the first reading of today's Mass.

But the Catholic Church does not depend on Scripture alone, as the Protestants do, but on the truth inherent in the Church, the truth Our Lord guaranteed when he promised and sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

For this reason, the Church believes that deep within the hearts of all of us there is a fundamental sense of what is true, a kind of sixth sense, deriving from the Spirit of Baptism. When the Church as a whole believes something to be true, how could it be otherwise, since Christ has put his Spirit of Truth on his Church? The Second Vatican Council called this sixth sense the "sensus fidei", a sense of the faith. Now there can be no doubt that the

whole Church always believed and still believes that Mary was indeed assumed into heaven. When Pius XII defined the dogma, he wrote around to all the bishops of the Church to ascertain what the ordinary people believed throughout the world. It was only after discovering that this was a universal belief that he defined it.

This protection of the Church from error by God's Holy Spirit is known as the infallibility of the Church. Now the Pope, who is the kind of focal point, the white hot centre of the Church, consequently enjoys this charisma of infallibility too. He represents the Church and when he speaks in a strict and limited way as Head of the Church, making it quite clear that he is speaking in his capacity as Successor of Peter and representative of the Church, he can pronounce infallibly on matters of faith or morals. We call this "defining" doctrine, making what was unclear absolutely clear. He cannot define something which has never been accepted by the Church before; but only something

that has always been believed by the Church down the centuries, something that has always been part of the "Tradition".

So, in 1950, Pope Pius XII officially and infallibly declared the Assumption of Mary to be a dogma of the Church, which Catholics must now subscribe to in order to remain faithful to the Church: "We pronounce, declare and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul to heavenly glory"

By using the words, "having completed the course of her earthly life" the Definition leaves open the question whether Mary died or was taken up to heaven while still alive. You can believe either; but what you must believe is that Mary is now in heaven, sharing the glory of her Son and a sign to us of how we shall one day be when the salvation won by her Son has had its final effect on us.

God bless you,

Fr Antony Jones