

LIVING FAITH

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

August 15, 2021



THE GOSPEL FOR TODAY (Luke 1:39-56)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

TAKING THE GOSPEL HOME

The Gospel for today is Mary's song of praise and thanks, her "Magnificat." Mary's Magnificat proclaims her joy at how good God has been to her, and she sings that she sees God's goodness as an expression of God's love, mercy, strength and justice. Mary's hymn tells us something about how she understood God's reign breaking into our world and turning everything upside down. God had surprised her, choosing a simple, rural girl to be the means by which salvation would be made manifest in the world. God is a God of surprises, and God had not chosen someone rich and powerful to do God's will. No. God had made an unexpected choice. This showed Mary that God did not think as people think, and God has a greater purpose in mind. God was about to make all things new.

PONDER AND DISCUSS...

- How has God has changed your life?
- How do you see God continuing to make all things new?
- How are you part of God making all things new?

WHY STAY IN THE CHURCH?

JULY 12, 2021

Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Several weeks ago after giving a lecture at a religious conference, the first question from the audience was this one: How can you continue to stay in a church that played such a pivotal part in setting up and maintaining residential schools for the indigenous people of Canada? How can you stay in a church that did that?

The question is legitimate and important. Both in its history and in its present, the church has enough sin to legitimize the question. The list of sins done in the name of the church is long: the Inquisition, its support for slavery, its role in colonialism, its link to racism, its role in thwarting women's rights, and its endless historical and present compromises with white supremacy, big money, and political power. Its critics are sometimes excessive and unbalanced, but, for the most part, the church is guilty as charged.

However, this guilt isn't unique to the church. The same charges might be leveled against any of the countries in which we live. How can we stay in a country that has a history of racism, slavery, colonialism, genocide of some of its indigenous peoples, radical inequality between its rich and its poor, one that is callous to desperate refugees on its borders, and one within which millions of people hate each other? Isn't it being rather selective morally to say that I am ashamed to be a Catholic (or a Christian) when the nations we live in share the same history and the same sins?

Still, since the church is supposed to be leaven for a society and not just a mirror of it, the question is valid. Why stay in the church? There are good apologetic answers on this, but, at the end of the day, for each of us, the answer has to be a personal one. Why do I stay in the church?

First, because the church is my mother tongue. It gave me the faith, taught me about God, gave me God's word, taught me to pray, gave me the sacraments, showed me what virtue looks like, and put me in contact with some living saints. Moreover, despite all its shortcomings, it was for me authentic enough, altruistic enough, and pure enough to have the moral authority to ask me to entrust my soul to it, a trust I've not given any other communal entity. I'm very comfortable worshipping with other religions and sharing soul with non-believers, but in the church in which I was raised, I recognize home, my mother tongue.

Second, the church's history is not univocal. I recognize its sins and openly acknowledge them, but that's far from its full reality. The church is also the church of martyrs, of saints, of infinite generosity, and of millions of women and men with big, noble hearts who are my moral exemplars. I stand in the darkness of its sins; but I also stand in the light of its grace, of all the good things it has done in history.

Finally, and most important, I stay in the church because the church is all we've got! There's no other place to go. I identify with the ambivalent feeling that rushed through Peter when, just after hearing Jesus say something which had everyone else walk away from him, Peter was asked, "do you want to walk away too?" and he (speaking for all the disciples) replied: "We'd like to, but we have no place else to go. Besides we recognize that, despite everything, you still have the words of everlasting life."

In essence, Peter is saying, "Jesus, we don't get you, and what we get we often don't like. But we know we're better off not getting it with you than going any place else. Dark moments notwithstanding, you're all we've got!"

The church is all we've got! Where else can we go? Behind the expression, I am spiritual, but not religious (however sincerely uttered) lies either an invincible failure or a culpable reluctance to deal with the necessity of religious community, to deal with what Dorothy Day called "the asceticism of church life". To say, I cannot or will not deal with an impure religious community is an escape, a self-serving exit, which at the end of the day is not very helpful, not least for the person saying it. Why? Because for compassion to be effective it needs to be collective, given the truth that what we dream alone remains a dream but what we dream with others can become a reality. I cannot see anything outside the church that can save this world.

There is no pure church anywhere for us to join, just as there is no pure country anywhere for us in which to live. This church, for all its checkered history and compromised present, is all we have. We need to own its faults since they are our faults. Its history is our history; its sin, our sin; and its family, our family – the only lasting family we've got.

*Used with permission of the author, Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser. He can be contacted through his website, www.ronrolheiser.com
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THE CHURCH TEACHES

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

AUGUST 15



The Assumption window from the windows by Gerard Earley on the ground level of the Basilica-Cathedral in St. John's.

On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII defined the Assumption of Mary to be a dogma of faith: "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." The pope proclaimed this dogma only after a broad consultation of bishops, theologians and laity. What the pope solemnly declared was already a common belief in the Catholic Church.

We find homilies on the Assumption going back to the sixth century. The feast was celebrated under various names- Commemoration, Dormition, Passing, Assumption- from at least the fifth or sixth century. By the 13th century there was universal agreement.

Scripture does not give an account of Mary's Assumption into heaven. Revelation 12 speaks of a woman who is caught up in the battle between good and evil. Many see this woman as Mary, who best embodies the people of both Old and New Testaments, her Assumption can be seen as an exemplification of the woman's victory.

Since Mary is closely associated with all the mysteries of Jesus' life, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit has led the Church to believe in Mary's share in his glorification. So close was she to Jesus on earth, she must be with him body and soul in heaven.

Hail! Holy Queen

Hail! Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To you do we cry,
poor banished children of Eve.
To you do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
Turn then, O most gracious advocate,
your eyes of mercy toward us;
and after this our exile,
show unto us the blessed fruit
of your womb, Jesus.
O clement! O loving! O sweet Virgin Mary!

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.
That we may be made worthy
of the promises of Christ.

Watch a video about Mary and Marian feasts [here](#).

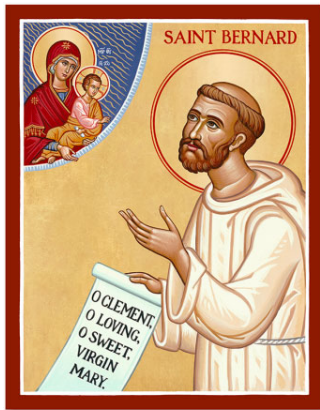
FEASTS THIS WEEK

ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

1090-1153

ABBOT AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

AUGUST 20



Bernard of Clairvaux, O.Cist was a French abbot and a major leader in the reform of Benedictine monasticism that caused the formation of the Cistercian order. He was one of seven children born to a noble French family. After the death of his mother, when Bernard was only 19, he sought admission into the Cistercian order. He was such a compelling and convincing orator that 30 of his family and friends followed him into the Cistercian order. He founded a new monastery at *Clairvaux*, on June 25, 1115, and the names of Bernard and Clairvaux would soon become inseparable. The abbey became too small for its members and it was necessary to send out bands to found new houses. Bernard died at 63 years of age on August 20, 1153 in Clairvaux, France. He was canonized on January 18, 1174 by Pope Alexander III. He was named a Doctor of the Church in 1830.

St. Bernard is patron of Cistercians, the region of Burgundy, beekeepers and candlemakers.

THE QUEENSHIP OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

AUGUST 22



Pope Pius XII established this feast in 1954. At the Annunciation, Gabriel announced that Mary's Son would receive the throne of David and rule forever. At the Visitation, Elizabeth calls Mary "mother of my Lord." As in all the mysteries of Mary's life, she is closely associated with Jesus: Her queenship is a share in Jesus' kingship. We can also recall that in the Old Testament the mother of the king has great influence in court. In the fourth century Saint Ephrem called Mary "Lady" and "Queen." Hymns of the 11th to 13th centuries address Mary as queen: "Hail, Holy Queen," "Hail, Queen of Heaven," "Queen of Heaven."

The feast is a logical follow-up to the Assumption, and is celebrated on the octave day of that feast. In his 1954 encyclical *To the Queen of Heaven*, Pius XII points out that Mary deserves the title because she is Mother of God, and is closely associated with Jesus' redemptive work, because of her perfection, and because of her intercessory power.

