

[Readings: Rev. 11:19a; 12:1a-6a, 10 ab; Ps. 45; 1 Cor 15:20-27; Lk. 1:39-56]

Twenty years ago, a newspaper described some new guest suites at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. The hotel was unveiling five new “First Lady Suites” in honor of five American presidents’ wives. Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Rosalyn Carter, Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush provided advice on décor and memorabilia for the suites. Each suite has the official White House portrait of, and autographed books from, the First Lady after whom it is named, as well as a brass plate with her signature over the door. The memorabilia and special colors used in each suite reflect the individual tastes of each First Lady.

Today we celebrate the day when God brought the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Heavenly Suite prepared for her. Mary is the First Lady of the Church because she is the Mother of God. We might wonder how HER suite in Heaven is decorated! Is Mary’s “official portrait” there? No, there aren’t any. Any autographed books? No, Mary didn’t have any contracts with any publishers.

Mary’s Suite in Heaven, God’s special place prepared for her, is decorated with what she herself left us. It is something that best expresses the meaning of her life, that marvelous song of praise and thanksgiving we just heard in today’s Gospel. We call this song the Magnificat, from the first word in its Latin version. Mary’s song is not about herself: it is about magnifying God’s work in and through her for us.

These words of the Magnificat show that after her Son, Mary most clearly embodied God’s saving plan, the way of living that Jesus preached. She was most like her Son in His self-sacrifice for the sake of humanity. Mary followed her Son, “the first fruits of those who have died into everlasting glory” because she followed her Son along the ways of God’s Kingdom on earth.

The image found in today’s First Reading is traditionally interpreted as a reference to Mary in Heaven: “She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod.” But the image is also one for the Church, the living Body of Christ for all generations: “The woman fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God.” The Church is still in “the desert.”

We know that in Old Testament times, “the desert” was the dwelling place of the devil and evil spirits. Jesus teaches us in the New Testament that “the desert” is a place where He goes on retreat, to be one with His Father in prayer. Such is the desert for us: it is both a place of sin, rejection and abandonment, and it is a place of renewal and rebirth.

Mary’s Assumption into Heaven is God’s testimony that Mary, the one most like her Son, already shares in the triumph of God’s risen life. St. Paul needs to explain to the people of Corinth that when we die, it’s not just a matter of the soul being freed from the body. One day the soul AND the body will rise.

My friends, you and I share in the same promise, the same hope that Mary now enjoys. On the day of our Baptism, we were called to die to sin and to the world, so that the Kingdom of God could take root and blossom in our lives. You and I are still walking the pilgrim way of faith on earth. Our eternal destiny has not yet come to pass. So what do we do in the meantime?

We welcome the Word of God into our lives. Each morning we rededicate our day to being the servant of the Lord. We ask, “Lord, what do YOU want me to do today to show Your presence in the world? How can I magnify YOU?”

We make choices that embrace the culture of life, not the culture of death. We make choices that respect and celebrate life, and we reject anything that will harm us or bring us closer to our death or the death of others.

We ask the Lord to open our eyes and our ears to hear the cry of the poor; not only the materially and financially poor, but those who need someone there to listen, to counsel, to support. We show mercy along with justice when others are in need of it. We remember that wherever we go and whatever we do, whatever good or evil we have to endure, Jesus and Mary are watching us, interceding for us, protecting us and loving us. Even if it doesn’t seem so from all appearances.

Mary has gone before us like her Son to prepare OUR suite. May we live her Magnificat in this life, so that we may find ourselves neighbors in our eternal suite with Jesus and Mary in the next. Mary, Assumed into Heaven, pray for us!