

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

August traditionally is the month dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as given to us during the apparitions of Mary in Fatima back in 1917.

How do we know Mary best? As with anyone, her key is in her heart. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be" (Mt 6:21). We know from the Magnificat that Mary's treasure is her Son.

Scripture references Mary's heart twice, both in the second chapter of Luke's Gospel (verses 19 and 51). We learn that Mary "reflects" and "keeps" in her heart the mysterious events surrounding the Incarnation. Intertwined with her core identity is the identity of her Son and that of His mission as Redeemer and Savior. Mary's *fiat* ("yes") was the portal through which God chose to allow Himself to begin His saving work. Mary's *fiat* remedied Adam and Eve's "no," showing us the way to her Son, Who is the remedy for all sin. The Virgin Mother is the channel through which God brings healing balm to humanity's sinfulness, through whom we experience the fullness of grace. She who is "full of grace" presents to us and leads us to her Son.

Today we celebrate the day when God brought the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Heavenly Home prepared for her. Mary is the Mother of the Church because she is the Mother of God. After her Son, Mary most clearly embodies 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" as St. Paul says, 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 who 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: both a place of sin, rejection and abandonment, and a place of renewal and rebirth.

As the “woman clothed with the sun” enters the desert, we too once again are forced into the desert by national and international events. We call upon Mary, our heavenly Mother, especially in this time of war and violence in the world, and scandal and crisis in our Church. When we are tempted to anger, despair or even the loss of our faith, let us turn to Mary’s Immaculate Heart for comfort. Let us be resolved to work for justice, for reconciliation and healing, in our world and in our Church, secure under Mary’s loving protection.

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. You and I share in the same promise, the same hope that Mary now enjoys. 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. Instead of saying, “Lord, here’s what I want you to do for me today...” we can 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. 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 and justice when others are in need of it. We remember that wherever we go, 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. Where they have gone, we hope to follow. AMEN