

Assumption of the BVM – August 15, 2008

LESSON: Mary the Ark

One of my favorite movies is the “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” All the excitement and adventure – and all of it built around the Ark of the Covenant – that VERY special “box” which symbolized God’s presence and closeness to the Israelites – which contained a piece of the Manna which fed the Israelites during their 40-year journey through the desert; the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments; and Moses’ staff, which parted the Red Sea – OK it was God who parted the Red Sea – the staff was a symbol.

My favorite part of the movie toward the end when The Nazi’s have captured the Ark and have all gathered to open up the ark. As it is pried open, God’s glory and majesty is seen as lightning shoots out and kills all the Nazi’s who dared disturb this sacred sign and symbol of God’s presence and power.

It’s the same Ark of the Covenant that we hear about in today’s first reading. But, following Fr. Thoms’ lead, I’m going to ask you to open up your Bible to 1 Chron 15 ... oh, you don’t have it? Well then, open up the Misalette to page (SH – 52) (SJ 126). Here we have the Old Testament image of the Ark.

King David has assembled ALL of Israel in the holy city of Jerusalem: all in order to bring the Ark of the LORD to the place which had been prepared for it – the Holy of Holies in the Temple – where only one man could go – and even then, only once every year – SO holy was the Ark. As the Ark is going, the people rejoice with “harps, lyres, cymbals to make a loud sound of rejoicing.” Then, the Ark of God was place in the tent which David had pitched for it – and they offered up burnt offerings. All this hub-bub about a big box – but not just a box – the vessel which contained the symbols of God’s closeness to and love for His people, Israel.

Now, open your Bibles to Rev 11 – oh, I forgot – you don’t have them: open the Misalette to page (SH 54) (SJ 128). Now, in the New Testament, we hear about the Ark once again: this time, “God’s temple in heaven was opened; and the Ark of His Covenant could be seen in the temple: A great sign appeared, a woman clothed with the sun...” What do you think that St. John of Patmos – the human author of Revelation - was trying to tell us by putting these verses together – “the Ark of God’s Covenant was seen...a woman, clothed with the sun about to give birth...”? Remember, chapters and verses were added MUCH later to help us study and locate passages – originally there were no divisions like that – so these two thoughts blended one into the other

The connection SHOULD be quite obvious to us. The Ark – the sign and symbol of God’s presence and closeness to His people – that Ark in the Old Testament which was greeted with such joy and excitement – prefigures and points to *another* ark – the one which is in God’s Temple in Heaven – the Women, clothed with the sun.

GOD'S ARK IS MARY! It was MARY who carried within her (in her womb) the TRUE sign of God's love for and closeness to His people – for it was she who carried Christ in her womb.

Now, for us as Catholics, this is easy – but for many of our non-Catholic Christian brothers and sisters, for some reason it is NOT so easy – so let's see if, as we celebrate Mary today – as we celebrate her Assumption body and soul into heaven – let's see if we can help them by helping ourselves better understand Mary and her role in salvation history.

From the beginning of the Church, Christians have always seen the **Blessed Virgin Mary** as an **image** of the **whole Church**.

- ✍ Mary brought the baby Jesus **into the world** on the first Christmas, **took care of him** as he grew to manhood, and **accompanied him** as he fulfilled his mission.
- ✍ The Church as a whole has a **similar relationship** with the **mystical body** of Christ - with **every Christian**, the **members** of that body.
- ✍ The Church continually **brings Christ into the world** through her many **works** of charity and apostolate, and especially through bringing more **Christians** into the world in **baptism**.
- ✍ And with her **teaching** and **sacraments**, the Church **cares for** and **accompanies** her members as they grow to maturity and carry out their missions.

And so, just as God **assumed Mary into heaven**, body and soul, at the **end** of her earthly mission, so God will lift the **whole Church** into perfect communion with himself in heaven at the end of **history**.

Mary's Assumption, then, is **God's promise** to us.

Every Christian who **follows Mary's path** of **humility and fidelity to God's will** can look forward to following her into the **glories and joys of heaven**.

ILLUSTRATION: Why Jesus Gave Us His Mother

This is one of the reasons that God decided to **share his mother** with us.

Many **non-Catholic** Christians really don't pay much attention at all to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

- ✍ We Catholics, on the other hand, recognize her as the **Queen of Heaven and Earth**.
- ✍ We know that Jesus **took her up to heaven**, body and soul, as soon as her earthly mission was over.
- ✍ This is the dogma of the **Assumption**, defined by the Church with an infallible papal definition.

It **makes sense** that the woman who bore God in her womb should be borne by God into heaven, and not left in a grave to turn back into dust.

In fact, in the Old Testament, the Queen of the Kingdom of Israel was always the Queen **Mother**.

- ✍ One of King Solomon's first acts when his father David gave him the throne was to raise his mother Bathsheba to his side, to be the royal Queen - a mini-Assumption.
- ✍ There was a **practical** reason for this tradition: Old Testament Kings used to marry **more than one wife**, but he had only **one Mother**, so she became Queen.
- ✍ But there was also a **deeper, prophetic meaning** at work.
- ✍ God was already planning to send the Messiah through a **Virgin**, to involve a **Mother** intimately in the **Redemption**, just as a mother (Eve) had been involved intimately in the **Fall** (original sin).

God did it that way **on purpose**.

Jesus gives his Mother a special place in the ongoing history of salvation, because he wants to tell us something about **his love for us**.

- ✍ It is faithful, strong and indestructible, because he is our **Father**.
- ✍ But it is also **gentle, patient, and ever-present**, always watching over us - like a **Mother**.

Mary, our heavenly Queen and spiritual Mother, **reminds** us of this.

APPLICATION: Explaining Mary to Non-Catholic Christians

This is a point that can be **useful** in our **conversations** with **non-Catholic Christians**.

Many of them love **Christ** sincerely, but rarely pay any special attention to Christ's **Mother**.

They are afraid that if they give special recognition to **Mary**, they will be **taking away** recognition from Christ.

But that's not true at all. In fact, the Assumption **proves** that it doesn't:

- ✍ Christ **himself** freely and purposely chose to give a **special role** to his Mother, as the Assumption **reminds** us,
- ✍ so he will certainly not be **upset** if we do the **same**.

It doesn't **take away** from Christ's glory to recognize and appreciate the **wonderful things** he has done for his Mother!

- ✍ On the contrary!
- ✍ It **glorifies him** when we recognize the **power of his grace** at work through her and in her.

- ✍ And for this very **reason** she herself prophesied, in the Gospel passage of the Visitation (the Magnificat) [**Friday only**: we just heard], that "**all generations** will call her blessed."
- ✍ Let's **take comfort** knowing that he wants to do wonderful things for **us** as well.
- ✍ Let's ask Christ to give us the **wisdom and courage** to speak about his Mother **truly and confidently**,
- ✍ so that **all** Christians can get to know **him** better by getting to know better **the person who knows him best**.

APPLICATION: True Devotion to Mary

Mary is now in heaven, body and soul.

And just as Christ the King governs his Church from there, so too Mary his **Queen Mother intercedes** for sinners there and **sends** us help and encouragement.

- ✍ This is reason behind the many **apparitions** of the Blessed Virgin Mary throughout history.
- ✍ And it is also the reason why the Church encourages all of us, old and young, men and women, boys and girls, to have a **strong devotion to Mary**.
- ✍ But we must **understand clearly** what **true devotion** to Mary really includes.
- ✍ It does **not** consist mainly in **pretty pictures** or saying a lot of **prayers** - those are devotions, not devotion.
- ✍ It is possible to kneel in front of **pretty pictures** and say ten Hail Marys and then go back to work and start **gossiping, lying, nagging, cheating**, or otherwise making other people's lives **miserable**.

That is **not** true devotion to Mary.

- ✍ The beautiful paintings and the simple, profound Marian prayers are meant to **stir up** in our hearts a strong desire to **imitate Mary's Son**, to **follow in Christ's footsteps**, just as she did.
- ✍ {FRIDAY ONLY: In today's Gospel, } Mary shows us **exactly** what that entails.
- ✍ After her encounter with the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, she didn't become obsessed with her own **self-importance** as the mother of the Messiah.
- ✍ Instead, she went **in haste** to her older cousin Elizabeth, who was **pregnant** with John the Baptist, and spent the next three months taking care of and helping **her**.
- ✍ True devotion to Mary means doing **that**: self-forgetfully **giving** our lives for the good of those **around** us, just like our Mother.

Today as we renew our faith in Christ's **power** by contemplating the great **miracle** of the Assumption, let's ask our heavenly Mother to obtain for us that **all-important grace** of gradually changing our **selfish** hearts into **self-giving, Christian** ones.