



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Homily

[*Revelation 11:19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab; Psalm 45; 1 Corinthians 15: 20-26; Luke 1:39-56*]

As travel possibilities are now opening up, we can look forward to the occasional interesting encounter with other travellers. I remember one occasion when, in the process of boarding a flight, a man saw me and shouted out: “Hey there, Father! I’m sure glad to see you on this plane!” Since I had not met this man before, I was curious to know what he meant. He explained, “Well, if this here plane goes down, I’m gonna latch on to your coattails, ‘cause I know where you’re goin’!” Now, while I wouldn’t dare presume that his assumption about my likely trajectory was justified, I was at least glad to think that even the possibility gave him some comfort.

That encounter raises important questions. In fact, they are the same questions raised by our Eucharistic celebration today on this Solemnity of the Assumption: where are we going? Where is our life journey headed? And who can help us get there?

In the mystery of Jesus Christ, these questions are answered. By the Incarnation, death and resurrection of His Son, God has revealed to us that that our life does, indeed, have a destiny: everlasting life, an eternal participation in God’s own Triune life. Here we have answered not only the question of our destiny but also that of “whose coattails” we need to “latch on to” if we are to attain it. Jesus Christ alone is the way to eternal life. This was his own testimony when he declared, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (*John 14:6*).

Now, while in Jesus the destination of eternal life is effectively promised, in Mary, his mother, we see that promise fulfilled. We are celebrating today the solemnity of Mary’s Assumption, body and soul, into heaven. This was her unique privilege, certainly, yet at the same time it radiates throughout the Church as a sure sign of hope for us all. Moreover, we see in Mary’s relationship with her son how that hope can become a reality for each of us. In her we see what it really means to “latch on to the coattails” of the Lord so that he can bring us to the destiny he won for us on the Cross.

To explain what I mean, let’s consider for a moment an important line in the first reading. From the Book of Revelation, we heard this: “God’s temple in heaven was opened and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.” Here the ark of the covenant refers to Mary. Israel of ancient days had deeply revered as the dwelling place of God the ark which housed the tablets of the Old Covenant. Now that covenant is definitively renewed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is thus in himself the new covenant between God and humanity. His Incarnation within Mary rendered her womb the ark of this new covenant. God truly dwelt within her.

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Here is the lesson for us: Mary became the ark of the new covenant because she welcomed the Word in faith and allowed it to grow within her. What is more, she remained at all times obedient to this Word as it was later spoken in the One born from her. Again, there is a unique privilege granted here to Mary, yet we can discern in this gift accorded only to her a call from God to each of us to become an “ark” of Christ by welcoming His Word within us and accepting it in faith. “Latching onto the coattails” of the Lord is not a matter of an external clinging to him, a “catching a ride”, if you will. No, what is required is a deep inner attachment to the Lord Jesus born of a communion with him when His Word dwells within us. From this communion of faith and love, God causes great things to happen in our lives, as Mary herself proclaims in the Magnificat. The greatest of all God’s deeds is what He gives us in Christ: rescue from sin and death, and the bestowal of the gift of everlasting life.

The plane that day arrived at its destination without incident, and my co-traveller didn’t have to worry about how far away his seat was from mine. In the course of our daily living, however, we all do need to take very careful note of our proximity to Christ. Let us remain always close to him in a union of faith and love, precisely by hearing, welcoming, and obeying his Word, so that he will lead us by grace and mercy to where he and his Mother have already preceded.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
St. Joseph’s Basilica
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