

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, C – August 15, 2016 – 700 words
Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L. – Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 6:30pm Mass

The Blessed Mother's entire life is marked by complete and total fidelity to the will of the Heavenly Father. From her first words spoken in Scripture, ending with "Be it done unto me according to thy word", to her last recorded words, "Do whatever he tells you", we can see that all she ever desired was to be obedient to God and for us to be so as well. And it was because of her uncompromised fidelity to the Lord that she merited to be taken up to heaven not only in her soul but also in her body at the moment her earthly life was completed. It would not have been fitting for her body to suffer corruption; Christ fulfilled the fourth commandment perfectly with respect to his mother and honored her to the fullest extent possible.

In bestowing this unique privilege on the Blessed Virgin Mary, Christ anticipated in her what is to happen to us all at the end of time. When we die, our bodies will be subject to corruption – that corruption will either be forced by cremation or take its natural course in a casket in the ground. Either way, our bodies will return "to dust", as the scripture says and as our Ash Wednesday liturgy reminds us. But at the second coming, our bodies "will rise incorruptible", as St. Paul teaches; they will be glorified and be reunited with our souls. And that is how we will be from that point unto eternity, whether in heaven – or, God forbid, in hell. Mary's body knew no corruption, but was immediately raised and entered into heavenly glory, together with her soul, at the very moment of her death.

What was the Blessed Mother's death like? Many saints, popes, theologians, and holy members of the faithful down through the ages have held that she did, in fact, suffer a natural death, in order to imitate her Son in every way. If he had to die, then she would die also. And it is fitting to say that just as Christ freely offered himself to the Father and was in full control of his life at every moment, so it was with the Blessed Mother. Her death as a total self-offering to God, freely given, and done full of love: "Into your hands, I commend my spirit". Indeed, we can speculate, as St. Francis de Sales did, that the cause of Mary's death was love.¹ She died for love of her Son, freely offering her life and yearning to be reunited with him in heaven.

St. Francis de Sales also calls our Blessed Mother's death "the noblest of deaths... a death of which the very angels would desire to die, if die they could".² What will our own death be like? That, we cannot now know. All we can do is plan well through daily prayer and daily striving, with the help of God's grace, to live in ever greater obedience to him – in imitation of our Blessed Mother's own radical fidelity. Each night, when we close our eyes in sleep, we practice for death. And we entrust our death in a particular way – whenever it might come – to the Blessed Mother's care: for since she endured that reality herself and faced it so nobly, she is especially able to exercise her spiritual motherhood over us in the last moments of our life.³

On this feast day, we once again look to her who then entered into the exalted heights of heaven, yet continues to be close to us, her beloved children, powerfully helping us to follow where she has gone. Her life is a model for ours, and her prayer enables us to follow her example. May our love of God and obedience to his will increase each day, so that having made a prudent preparation, we will one day be found worthy to offer ourselves back to him and so be with him, our Blessed Mother, and all the saints, in glory – first in our souls, and at the end, at the resurrection, in our bodies as well. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

¹ Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Book VII, Chapter XIII.

² *Ibid.*

³ Cf. Pope St. John Paul II, *General Audience*, 25 June 1997.