

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – August 15, 2019 – Very Rev. Bryan Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5:30pm Vigil, 6:30pm Feast Day Mass – 825 words

The celebration of the Feast of the Assumption dates back to ancient times, but until the end of the sixth century it was held on January 18. Mauritius, the Emperor of Constantinople, moved its celebration to August 15, where it has remained ever since.¹ And this time corresponds roughly with the summer harvest season in the Northern Hemisphere; thus we see one of the ways that our liturgical calendar follows the rhythms of life. While the first fruits of the summer crops are being gathered, so also we honor our Blessed Mother as the first fruits of God's great harvest of salvation.

Indeed, the harvest as an image of salvation is used by our Lord himself in various ways throughout the gospels. Think only of the parable of the wheat and the weeds:² the two grow up together, but at harvest time they are separated and the weeds are thrown into fire. We call Mary the first fruits of the harvest of salvation not because she was the first to enter into heaven – no, there were certainly others there before her – but because she was the first mere human being to go there in both soul and body. Everyone else must wait till the end – until the resurrection – for their bodies.

Our Lady's entering into heaven not only in soul but also in body is one of her privileges as Mother of God. Death entered into the world through sin,³ but the Lord privileged her by preserving her from all sin – hence her Immaculate Conception. Moreover, she remained entirely in his grace throughout her earthly life. Although in our tradition we may indeed speak of her death, it was not the consequence of any personal sin. Rather, she wished to identify so totally with her Son, who also did not die for personal sin but for ours. Mary died to share in Christ's saving mission.

Precisely because she never sinned, it was not fitting for her body to undergo corruption. Thus also it was for our Lord. She completely identified with him – but he was her Savior also. Again, these are privileges that we are speaking of – privileges are gifts: Our Lady had no native claim on them; they were freely bestowed on her by God. She cooperated with all the gifts he gave. Aided by his grace she completed her mission perfectly, and so did share in the work of our salvation. Let's think of salvation like a book: she was not its author, but its most eloquent reader or interpreter.

Therefore, with great delight, we celebrate the Blessed Virgin Mary's entrance body and soul into heavenly glory. The angels and saints welcome her with unspeakable joy. And even as she is crowned by none other than God himself and given a throne, from which she reigns as Queen of the Universe, yet she has not ceased to remain close to us. When fame arrives, some people forget where they came from. Our Blessed Mother never forgets. She uses her fame and her position, as it were, to obtain from the Lord all that we need. May we ever entrust ourselves to her intercession!

¹ Cf. Pius Parsch, *The Church's Year of Grace*, vol. IV (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1964), pp. 318-319.

² Cf. Matthew 13:24-30.

³ Cf. Romans 5:12.