

Homily for the
Solemnity of the Assumption
Preached by Fr. Brendan Freeman
(August 15, 2012)

[Scripture Readings: Rev. 11:19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab; 1 Cor 15:20-26; Lk 1:39-56]

In a homily for this feast day pope Benedict XVI quotes St. Augustine saying, "Before conceiving the Lord in her body, Mary conceived him in her soul". The Pope goes on to explain that, "Thus being God's Dwelling place on earth, in her the eternal dwelling place has already been prepared; it has already been prepared for ever." Then he says, "And this constitutes the whole content of the dogma of the assumption of Mary, body and soul into heavenly glory." So we have Mary as the dwelling place of God on earth and Mary as the dwelling place from all eternity in heaven; and just this morning at Vigils we heard Pope Pius XII say that "Mary was united from all eternity with Jesus Christ." Two dwelling places as it were, one in her body and the other in her soul.

To me this is a much richer explanation of the mystery of the Assumption than trying to visualize Mary being taken up into heaven at the end of her life on earth. It is relatively easy to think of Mary's Assumption in time. At the end of her life she passes from earth to heaven. We have famous paintings of the event. It is much more difficult to try to understand what St. Augustine and Pope Benedict are teaching. That Mary conceived in her soul and that, if I understand what Benedict is saying, her soul was prepared for all eternity. This leaves our senses empty handed as it were, not much to visualize. But it can lead us deeper into the mystery we are celebrating.

There is a modern love poem that ends with the words:

Absence
Of flesh
Is a description of love
In a modern love poem.

Absence of flesh means the person you love is not physically present. Because of this there can be a more spiritual presence, a presence in your heart. Understood this way absence is a very special type of presence. Mary is indeed in heaven but this does not mean she is absent from the earth. I believe it was St. Thérèse who wanted to spend her heaven doing good on earth. Since her Assumption Mary has been doing good for each generation of Christians who turn to her for help.

When St. Augustine said that Mary conceived Jesus in her soul before she conceived him in her

body he concludes that this first conception is more important than the second and that we too can conceive Christ in our soul, which is also a great theme of our Cistercian Fathers. However this will not be without struggle on our part. Pius XII tells us Mary was associated with her Son in the struggle against the enemy from the nether world. The first reading from the Book of Revelations describes this struggle which the liturgy indicates took place just before Jesus was born. Images are piled upon images. A woman clothed with the sun is about to give birth; a terrible red dragon with seven heads waits to devour the new born. The woman flees to the desert and her son is taken up to the throne of God, there to rule all nations. All the while this battle is unseen by human eyes, it is absent from view. All we know is the birth in the cave at Bethlehem and Angels singing and Shepherds' adoring, all is calm, all is peaceful. But there is a struggle of cosmic proportions going on in the background.

In our own life we do not see how evil is trying to stop us from bringing Christ to birth in our world and the woman clothed with the sun is absent from our sight but present in our souls helping us bring forth the new life in Christ. The life span of Mary from her Immaculate Conception to her Glorious Assumption can be measured in years of time but her life goes on now in eternal years, absent from sight but present in the depths of our souls.