

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Dear Parishioners,

On Wednesday we celebrate the greatest of the Marian feasts. The dogma of the Assumption has long been believed and cherished by the Church, even if it was only declared as such by Pope Pius XII in 1950. A tradition which goes back many centuries, but which is not contemporaneous with the New Testament, is that Mary ended her life at Ephesus. That Mary died, like every human being and indeed like her son, is beyond dispute. Yet it is the Church's belief that as soon as her earthly journey reached its term she was assumed straight into heaven. We last encounter her on the day of Pentecost when, together with the Apostles in the upper room, she was witness to the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit also descended on her and we can only assume that, driven by the power of the Spirit, she spent the rest of her life, however withdrawn and wherever in seclusion, bearing witness to her son as Messiah and risen Lord.

Mary was fully human. She was indeed the Mother of God, she bore in her womb Jesus who became the Christ through his death and resurrection and was later acknowledged as both human and divine, the second person of the Trinity. But Mary was the human vessel selected by God to secure the salvation of the world. It was in the fullness of her humanity that Mary was assumed into heaven. So we know - and it is a matter of binding, infallible belief - that in Mary a human being is in heaven.

What makes this celebration so important is less the legitimate and deserved honour her assumption conferred on Mary than the guarantee that a human being now resides in heaven. And if Mary is there, so too are all those we have loved who have lived virtuous lives. And so too will we be one day. The celebration of the assumption enables us to live in the security that, after this life is over and death overtakes us, we too - after the purification we call Purgatory - will become citizens of heaven. The celebration is of Mary's present fullness of life and of the promise of the life that awaits us at the completion of our earthly journey. The Church's dogmas are never just lapidary statements of theological truth, they impact directly on our lives of faith and say something about us, our present life and the future that awaits us.

Father Patrick

