

## Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

Mary is spoiled for feasts in the Church's calendar. Deservedly so, she played a unique and indeed indispensable role in the history of salvation. Had Mary not given her assent to the request made to her on God's behalf by the angel Gabriel, history would have been very different. We mark Mary's motherhood of Jesus on 1 January; Candlemas on 2 February, too, finds Mary in a leading position, and so her feasts come fast and thick, major feasts and memorials, as the liturgical calendar moves forward across the year. This weekend we are celebrating the greatest of the Marian feasts and the Church pulls out all the stops to honour the Virgin Mary herself but also to celebrate the doctrine, the truth about our salvation history and the teaching which the Assumption exemplifies, and to give thanks for God's providential action in raising Mary to the highest heaven.

Pope Pius XII made it imperative for all Catholics to believe that *at the end of her earthly journey, the Virgin Mary was assumed (by God's power) into heaven*. It is the infallible teaching of the Church that Mary was assumed into heaven and now reigns there as Queen. Most Christians down the ages have visualised Mary's place in heaven in spatial terms. She must be sitting next to her Son. Given her proximity to Him, in every age people with petitions, with anxieties and with urgent requests have turned to her. Mary is there in an ideal position to intercede on our behalf. And having been a human being like us, and having been a mother, she is also ideally placed to have empathy with us, especially if there is illness, suffering or misfortune.

We all have a vested interest in Mary's privileged position as intercessor but we also have a more basic interest in knowing – and the Church teaching which Pope Pius XII declared infallibly in 1950 assures us that it is true – that a human being like us has been taken into heaven. An exceptional human being, a unique life with a unique purpose well lived, all that is true. But what makes the *doctrine* so important to us is that we too are destined for the privilege Mary currently enjoys. The doctrine of the Assumption underpins our faith in resurrection and new life and our hope that one day we will also share the joys of heaven. The doctrine also helps us fret less about those who have left us, those relatives and friends for whom we pray on 2 November, and adds another dimension to our understanding of the doctrine which is at the heart of All Saints on 1 November. And of course, as we shift our gaze back from ourselves to Mary, it is a wonderful occasion to thank Mary for all the prayers we have made through her which received favourable answer, and praise her for becoming mother of God's only Son.

**Father Patrick**