

## HOMILY 15 AUG 2010 ASSUMPTION HT-W/XII-PC

One of the topics that often arise in ecumenical discussions is the figure of Mary the mother of Jesus. A lot of Protestants object to what they think Catholics believe about her. It's a common enough perception among our separated brethren that Mary gets in the way of focusing on Jesus Christ, that she didn't need Christ's grace, that she is practically like a goddess whom Catholics worship. Today's feast of the Assumption is bound to trigger these sorts of misgivings among other Christians. Artistic representations of the Virgin being borne heavenward upon a cloud with angels at her feet evoke worries among believers of other traditions.

However, if we consider it all rather carefully, this solemnity of the Assumption is primarily not about anything Mary has done; rather it is first and foremost about what God has done to Mary. Today's feast celebrates the fact that, at the close of her life on earth, Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven by God. She did not ascend on her own power, as did the Lord Jesus. The Assumption was the culmination of a series of tremendous favors granted by God to the Virgin throughout her existence. She was preserved from sin from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace of Christ. As a virgin she conceived and bore God's only Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And at the close of her life, she was preserved from all corruption of death and sin by being bodily assumed into heaven by God. In commemorating Mary, we Catholics are celebrating what the Almighty has done in the heart and soul of a woman like us.

The key to Mary's greatness finds expression her famous Fiat. Let it be done to me according to your word, she said, thereby acceding to God's plan for her life foretold by the archangel Gabriel. Let me, though a virgin, become the mother of God's only Son. And this Fiat finds echo in her Magnificat that is recorded in the Gospel, where Mary proclaims the greatness of the Lord, a greatness manifested in the tremendous deeds he has done for her and for his chosen people. Mary allows God to penetrate into the deepest level of her womanhood and her personhood and thereby lets him into our fallen world in a definitive and unsurpassable way in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, her son and his.

Mary is a model for all of us. Too often we think that to become better people, better spouses, better parents, better priests, better Catholics, better whatever, we just need to work harder at it. But that's not what Mary teaches us. We become better, we become holy, not so much by what we do, but by what we let God do, to us. Let it be done to us, according to God's word. And that means that the key to our sanctification lies in letting God transform us, most especially through prayer and through the sacraments Christ instituted for this very purpose. If we want to become good and holy, we have to find time, if need be, we have to make time for daily prayer, we have to go to Sunday Mass faithfully, we have to go to Confession frequently, because those are the privileged places where God's grace touches our hearts and makes us holy. Holiness and goodness, faith, hope, and charity, the gifts and fruits of the Spirit, all those traits that set the saints apart from the sinners originate in God and must be sought from him. May our participation in this great sacrament of the Eucharist, may the prayers of the Blessed Virgin enlighten and inspire us to keener receptivity and greater openness to God's grace.