



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

On Sunday, August 15, our Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Gospel Reading for Sunday's feast day Mass, Mary prays with these words: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (cf. Lk 1:46-47).

The occasion is her visit to Elizabeth, an older cousin who is expecting her first child (the future John the Baptist). Elizabeth's unborn child "leaps" joyfully in his mother's womb and Elizabeth greets Mary with these words:

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.

Mary's response is The Magnificat (see below), the beautiful Canticle of Mary that the Church prays during Evening Prayer.

In his 2019 Angelus message, Pope Francis called our attention to the two verbs in this prayer: *magnifies and rejoices*. As the Holy Father notes, "We rejoice when something so wonderful happens that it is not enough to rejoice within, in our soul, but rather we wish to



express our happiness with our whole body: thus we rejoice.” Why does Mary rejoice? Because God has done great things through her. “Who knows whether we too have ever rejoiced for the Lord,” Pope Francis asks. “We rejoice over a successful result and over good news, but today Mary teaches us to rejoice in God. Why? Because he — God — does “great things.”

The second verb that Pope Francis points out is “magnify.” Mary proclaims (magnifies) the Lord’s greatness; she praises and exalts God saying that he is truly great. “It is important to seek great things in life,” the Holy Father says, “otherwise one becomes bemused by many trivialities. Mary shows us that in order to live a happy life, we should put God in first place because he alone is great.”

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrates one of the greatest experiences in human history—the passing of Mary from her earthly life to eternal life with her Son, Jesus. Because Mary was freed, by the grace of God, from the stain of Original Sin, she didn’t have to experience the bodily corruption that we all undergo after death. Mary’s death, which is often called her “dormition,” a kind of sleep, is a foreshadowing of the resurrection of the body that our Church teaches will happen to all the faithful on the Last Day.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#966): “The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son’s Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians.” We have reason to join Mary in proclaiming the greatness of God and in rejoicing in the resurrection from the dead that has been promised to us.

Pope Francis shares with us his reasons for rejoicing in Mary’s Assumption:

The feast of the Assumption of Mary is a call to each of us, especially those who are afflicted by doubt and sadness, and live with their gaze turned down, unable to raise their glance. Let us look up. Heaven is open. It does not inculcate fear. It is no longer distant because on the threshold of Heaven, a mother, our mother, is awaiting us. She loves us, she smiles at us and she thoughtfully assists us. Like every mother she wants the best for her children and she says to us: “You are precious in God’s eyes; you were not made for the small satisfactions of the world, but rather for the great joy of heaven”. Yes because God is joy, not boredom. God is joy.

God is joy, and God is great. That’s why Mary’s soul magnifies and rejoices. It’s also why she can proclaim: *From this day all generations will call me blessed, the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name.*

As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let's offer our thanks and praise to our merciful God who "lifts up the lowly" and "fills the hungry with good things." In the words of Pope Francis:

Let us allow ourselves to be attracted by true beauty. Let us not be befuddled by the trivialities of life, but rather let us choose the greatness of Heaven. May the Holy Virgin, Gate of Heaven, help us daily to trustfully and joyfully look to where our true home is, where she is awaiting us like a mother.

+Charles C. Thompson

Magnificat (cf. Lk 1:39–56)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for He has looked with favor on His humble servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed,
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name.

He has mercy on those who fear Him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of His servant Israel
for He has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise He made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.



A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

When man set foot on the moon, he said a phrase that became famous: “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”. In essence, humanity had reached a historical goal. But today, in Mary’s Assumption into Heaven, we celebrate an infinitely greater conquest. The



Madonna has set foot in paradise: she went there not only in spirit, but with her body as well, with all of herself. This step of the lowly Virgin of Nazareth was the huge leap forward for humanity. Going to the moon serves us little if we do not live as brothers and sisters on Earth. But that one of us dwells in the flesh in Heaven gives us hope: we understand that we are precious, destined to rise again.

God does not allow our bodies to vanish into nothing. With God, nothing is lost! In Mary, the goal has been reached and we have before our eyes the reasons why we journey: not to gain the things here below, which vanish, but to achieve the homeland above, which is forever. And Our Lady is the star that guides us. She went there first. She, as the Council teaches, shines “as a sign of sure hope and solace to the People of God during its sojourn on earth” ([Lumen gentium](#), 68).

What does our Mother advise us? Today in the Gospel the first thing she says is: “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Lk 1:46). Accustomed to hearing these words, perhaps we no longer pay attention to their meaning, perhaps we no longer pay attention to their meaning. To “magnify” literally means “to make great”, to enlarge. Mary “aggrandizes the Lord”: not problems, which she did not lack at the time, but the Lord. How often, instead, we let ourselves be overwhelmed by difficulties and absorbed by fears! Our Lady does not, because she puts *God as the first greatness of life*.

From here the *Magnificat* springs forth, from here joy is born: not from the absence of problems, which come sooner or later, but joy is born from the presence of God who helps us, who is near us. Because God is great. And, above all, God looks on the lowly ones. We are His weakness of love: God looks on and loves the lowly.

Mary, in fact, acknowledges that she is small and exalts the “great things” (v. 49) the Lord has done for her. What are they? First and foremost, the unexpected gift of life: Mary is a virgin yet she becomes pregnant; and Elizabeth, too, who was elderly, is expecting a child. The Lord works wonders with those who are lowly, with those who do not believe that they are great but who give ample space to God in their life. He enlarges His mercy to those who trust in Him, and raises up the humble. Mary praises God for this.

And we - we might ask ourselves - do we remember to praise God? Do we thank Him for the great things He does for us? For every day that He gives us, because He always loves us and forgives us, for His tenderness? In addition, for having given us His Mother, for the brothers and sisters He puts on our path, and because He opened Heaven to us? Do we thank God, praise God for these things? If we forget the good, our hearts shrink. But if, like Mary, we remember the great things that the Lord does, if at least once a day we were to “magnify” Him, then we would take a great step forward. One time during the day to say: “I praise the Lord”, to say, “Blessed be the Lord”, which is a short prayer of praise. This is praising God. With this short prayer, our hearts will expand, joy will increase. Let us ask Our Lady, the Gate of Heaven, for the grace to begin each day by raising our eyes to Heaven, toward God, to say to Him: "Thank you!" as the lowly ones say to the great ones.

(Angelus message for the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15, 2020).

My Prayer for You

Blessed Mother Mary, as we prepare to celebrate your glorious Assumption into Heaven on August 15, we turn to you and ask you to teach us how to say, and mean: “Let it be done to me as You say”. You were completely open to God’s will for you. Teach us to follow your example always. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we serve God’s people as faithful missionary disciples totally dedicated to Your Son Jesus. Amen.

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