

GOSPEL

LUKE 1:39-56

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

And Mary said: 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy – according to the promise he made to our ancestors – of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

On today's Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the holy faithful People of God joyfully express their veneration of the Virgin Mother. They do so in the common liturgy and also with thousands of different forms of piety; and the prophesy of Mary herself takes place in the same way: "all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48). Because the Lord has raised his humble handmaiden. Her Assumption into heaven, in body and soul, is a divine privilege accorded to the

Holy Mother of God for her particular union with Jesus. It is a *corporal and spiritual union*, which began with the Annunciation and matured throughout Mary's life through her unique participation in the mystery of her Son. Mary always went with her Son: she followed Jesus and thus we say she was the first disciple.

Our Lady's existence unfolded like that of an ordinary woman of her time: she prayed, managed her family and home, attended the synagogue.... However every daily action she performed was always done in total union with Jesus. And on Calvary this union culminated, in love, in compassion and in heartache. For this reason God also gave her full participation in Jesus' *Resurrection*. The body of the Blessed Mother was preserved from corruption, like that of the Son.

Today the Church invites us to contemplate this mystery: it shows us that *God wishes to save the whole man*, that is, to save *soul and body*. Jesus rose with the body he had assumed from Mary; and he ascended to the Father with his transfigured humanity; with his body, a body like ours, but transfigured. The Assumption of Mary, a human being, gives us confirmation of what our glorious fate will be. Greek philosophers had already understood that the soul of man is destined to happiness after death. However, they disregarded the body — considered the prison of the soul — and they did not understand that God had planned for the human body to be joined to the soul in the heavenly beatitude. Our body will be there, transfigured. This — the "*resurrection of the flesh*" — is a specific element of Christian revelation, a cornerstone of our faith.

The wondrous reality of the Assumption of Mary reveals and confirms the unity of the human person and reminds us that we are called to *serve and glorify God with our whole being*, soul and body. To serve God with the body alone would be the action of slaves; to serve him with the soul alone would be counter to our human nature. Around the year 220, a great Father of the Church, Saint

Irenaeus, stated that "the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God" (*Against Heresies*, iv, 20, 7). If we live this way, in joyful service to God, which is also expressed in generous service to our brothers and sisters, then on the day of the resurrection our fate will be like that of our heavenly Mother. We must therefore fully dedicate ourselves to accomplishing the exhortation of the Apostle Paul: "glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:20), and we shall forever glorify him in heaven.

Let us pray that Mary, through her maternal intercession, may help us live our daily journey in the earnest hope of being able to reach her one day, with all the Saints and our loved ones, all in heaven.

Reflection Questions

- Do you have a devotion to Our Lady? What does that look like in your life?
- Mary always points us to Jesus. In what ways do you see Mary pointing you to her Son?
- Mary is called the First Disciple because she was the first to say "yes" to Jesus. Are there areas in your life that you need to say "yes" to Jesus. What would that look like in practice?

PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer
with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.