

Fr Tom's homily for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

	<i>Vigil Mass</i>	<i>Mass of the Day</i>
First Reading:	1 Chron 15:3-4,15-16,16:1-2	Apoc 11:19,12:1-6,10
Second Reading:	1 Cor 15:54-57	1 Cor 15:20-26
Gospel:	Luke 11:27-28	Luke 1:39-56



“Do you know, I don't really believe in the Assumption, after all it was only invented in 1950”. Those were the stark words a friend of mine said to me over a pint one day. Now they always say that you should try to avoid talking about politics and religion in the pub, but this sentence just had to have an answer. You see my friend had got himself in a bit of a muddle. He was confusing the fact that Pope Pius XII had declared the belief in the Assumption of Our Lady as an infallible dogma in 1950, as some new invention, but this was not something that had come out of the blue.

In fact, if you look at history you can see that the idea that Our Lady had been bodily assumed into heaven had been around for a long time. If we were to play at being Sherlock Holmes or Miss Marple then there are various clues to this belief being common.

One of the first clues that this belief was prevalent is the simple fact that there are no (and never has been) relics of Our Lady. Relics have always been an important part of Christian worship – and surely the relics of the Mother of God would surely have been the most sought after.

Another clue that this is not something out of the blue is by looking at art. If you ever go into the Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore and visit the baptistery – right behind the font is a beautiful sculpture by Bernini (the father of the Bernini who worked on St Peter's) depicting the Assumption of Our Lady. So we can see the doctrine was already strong centuries ago.

But we can go back further there is biblical precedence that someone could be 'assumed body and soul into heavenly glory'. We have Enoch who was 'taken' by God, Elijah who 'went up by a whirlwind into heaven' The fact that the place of Moses' grave was unknown was taken by some to mean that he too had been translated bodily into heaven. So the concept of a person's being taken up into heaven existed long before Christianity.

The claims just mentioned may be dismissed as pious legends, and even as totally fictitious. Even so, such beliefs were obviously trying to say something about the eternal destiny of certain individuals who had played particularly significant roles in the history of salvation. That is what the reality of today is all about.

In solemnly recognizing Mary's unique destiny of her being assumed body and soul into heaven, the Catholic Church reaffirmed the inviolable dignity of every human person, over against the horrendous degradation of so many in the Second World War. Recently

I watched a documentary, where I heard stories of those who had been held in Japanese camps where life was cheap and disposable. Today's feast speaks of the sharing in the divine life.

Pope Benedict XVI explained this by saying that *"in the Assumption we see that in God there is room for man, God is man's home, but also there is room for God in man"*. In today's feast we see a complete uniting of God and humanity.

Today in Our Lady's Assumption we see the hope that is to come. It is a sign of the process that we will all go through as we enter into the nearer presence of God. In the preface of the Eucharist Prayer this will be explained as I say

For today the Virgin Mother of God was assumed into heaven as the beginning and image of your Church's coming to perfection and a sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people.

Our Lady then goes before us showing the way to full unity with God which comes through our humanity. In our humanity we have the divine life within us because through our baptism we enter into that divine relationship.

So today's feast is not just about historical events or about the future, it teaches us about the here and now and the eternal value of human life. We see life being cheapened through events or attitudes whether that is about issues of abortion or assisted suicide and euthanasia or the cheapness of the lives of those who seek refuge and travel across the seas in boats that are not sea worthy, or are desperately trying to seek refuge at Calais or in our own land.

This then is no recent idea, but one that shows the message of God's covenant with his people, which is timeless.

Today we can ask Our Lady's intercession, that our faith in eternal life may be strengthened and by that faith and hope, it may be transformed into a life lived well here and now. That we may recognise the divine life in our lives and make more room for God as we live.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.