

Homily of Deacon Dare Dutter, Holy Cross Church, Dewitt, on the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 2021

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is not a secret that the Virgin Mary is, next to Jesus, the central figure in the theology of the incarnation. We all follow a God who is without beginning or end. God the creator of our world and everything within it, lives forever. But in God's plan Jesus is fully human while staying fully divine. That is where Mary comes in. As we see in our readings today, Mary has said "yes" when God asked her to bear his son. She is the woman clothed with the sun that is spoken of in the first reading from Revelations and the one who asserts her trust that God will provide salvation for the poor and correction for those who have kept the poor under their power since the beginning of time. For her yes to God's plan and for her role in bringing Jesus safely to manhood, Mary received immortality by being assumed into heaven body and soul. We honor that assumption today.

Perhaps the most significant part of Mary's legacy after her assumption into heaven is that she continues to be active in the world. There are a large number of places where people have encountered her. She has been seen in Mexico, France, Portugal, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, and many more. These appearances have been accompanied by miracles, healings and visions of heaven that have changed the lives of millions of people. One of the most important of her appearances was to a poor Spanish priest named Dominic Guzman to whom she presented the Rosary. Dominic traveled into France preaching the word of God but his efforts gained few conversions and even fewer followers. He had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, but he also had a big problem. He was dead set against something called Albigensianism- a belief that Jesus was not both human and divine. The Albigensians taught that all matter, including the human body is evil while only God's spirit is good. Thus they were saying that Jesus could not be fully human and fully divine as we Catholics believe. He was really struggling when, in 1208, he went into a forest near Toulouse, France to pray, asking God to provide what he needed in order to overcome the Albigensians. Ancient accounts tell us that after three days of prayer and fasting, three angels appeared in the sky along with a ball of fire. When they disappeared, the Virgin Mary spoke, telling the priest that he must preach her Psalter in order to succeed in his efforts to overcome the Albigensians.

The Marian Psalter was a prayer developed by Cistercian monks, which involved praying 150 Hail Mary's divided into groups of 10 by Our Fathers. Prayer beads were used to keep track of the Hail Mary's. Mary revealed to St. Dominic the mysteries which were preached to correspond to the Psalter prayers. The mysteries were stories of Christ's life which directly contradicted the heresy of the Albigensians by focusing on the incarnation, death, and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Albigensian heretics were defeated within a few years after Mary introduced her prayer to St. Dominic, and order was restored to the church. That prayer-the Rosary-continues to be a source of grace and peace to all people.

The Rosary is a powerful prayer. Those who pray it have received miracle cures, been saved from wars and been enlightened with flashes of spiritual insight that have led them to change their lives for the better. A partial listing of the miracles that have been attributed to praying the Rosary is interesting and enlightening. For example, in 1945, during WWII, eight Jesuit priests were praying the Rosary in a parish house less than one mile from where the atomic bomb was dropped on the town of Hiroshima in Japan. While the church next to the parish house was destroyed and thousands of people were killed, the house remained standing, and the eight missionary priests miraculously survived. It was also miraculous and inexplicable that none of the eight Jesuits suffered from radiation exposure. In another miraculous event, praying the Rosary led to healing for Servant of God Fr. Patrick Peyton, who became known as the Rosary Priest. In 1938, after he had emigrated to the United States from Ireland but before he was ordained, he became very ill and was diagnosed with advanced Tuberculosis, which was incurable at the time. After his sister suggested that he pray to the Blessed Mother for her intercession, he consecrated himself to Mary and began devoutly praying the Rosary. To the astonishment of his doctors, he was completely and miraculously cured. He promised the Blessed Mother that he would spend his life promoting the Rosary.

Our church has fully embraced the Rosary prayer as something central to our practice of the faith. In “Rosarium Virginis Mariae,” Saint John Paul II eloquently shared his thoughts and feelings about the Rosary, saying; “Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the mother of the Redeemer. “Here at Holy Cross, you can experience the Rosary each morning as a group of parishioners recite it faithfully every day. As followers of the Catholic faith, we believe that Mary has a special place in the heart of her son Jesus. That is why the Rosary remains so powerful. Elizabeth, in our gospel said it very well in greeting her; Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” At the end of the Rosary we recite the “Hail Holy Queen” prayer in which we say; “to you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.” We are going to pray the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary after mass this weekend. Let us ask our Holy Mother to help us to negotiate the difficult times we live in. Only by turning toward the Blessed Virgin Mary on this great feast day, can we stay close to her son and obtain the grace promised by our God.