



ASSUMED

LETTER TO MSSP RELIGIOUS AND LAITY MESSAGE BY THE MSSP SUPERIOR GENERAL

FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION - 15TH AUGUST 2019

The Virgin Mary “*having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory*”. These words from Pope Pius XII’s Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* define this feast as an official belief of the Catholic Church. We as Missionary Society of Saint Paul hold Mary under this title as our patron saint and protector of our missions.

This time I was struck by the word assumed. The Church uses this word for Mary to distinguish it from the ascension of Jesus in heaven. Scripture uses the words “He was lifted up,” for Jesus; for Him we use the word “ascension,” which suggests something done under one’s own power, for Jesus Christ is God and is all-powerful. Yet for Mary we acknowledge that whatever happened with her was done through the power of God.

The word assumed strongly suggests the movement of being taken and made part of something bigger. We speak of assuming responsibilities, assuming a role and assuming someone under one’s care. This process of union is what this feast is all about. Mary, assumed into heaven, becomes one with God in his kingdom. Scripture is full of these processes of assumptions where it comes to the dealings between God and humanity.

Just to mention some salient episodes in Mary’s life we see the Holy Spirit assuming Mary under his shadow, thus making possible the gift of the incarnation. Then we meet Mary and the

apostle John under the cross. Here Jesus is asking both John and Mary to assume one another under their respective care making possible the Church. And in today's feast Mary is assumed by the Father to initiate the reintegration of all creation into God's kingdom.

Assumption happens also in our lives as faithful. The sacramental life is a case in point. In the sacrament of initiation, we are assumed through the baptismal waters into the family of God, each one of us becoming a firstborn and heir of God. And in the eucharist, we become what we eat, thus our nature is assumed into God's nature and thus transformed into the divine.

"Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." Rm 8:19. This is the revelation, that with Mary, all of us are called to make known – that the process of estrangement brought about by sin is being reversed by this process of union brought about by God's grace. As missionaries we are called to witness this healing process of assumption by bringing wholeness against a culture of fragmentation.

- We as custodians of creation need to assume responsibility towards mother earth, treating her as an extension of our humanity.

- We as heirs of the same Father need to assume into our family all those who are considered strangers, and hold in disdain every attempt to discriminate between those who merit and those who are automatically excluded.

- We people of faith need to assume the suffering of so many brothers and sisters who, for whatever reason, are hurt and are seeking healing. Rather than focusing meticulously on the certainty of objective truths and ideals so as to judge the human condition in black and white, good or wrong, insiders and outsiders, we are called to start with the practice of the heart – compassion (assuming the suffering).

Alexander Schmemmann (*Chiesa, mondo e missione*; Lipa – 2014, pgs 253-269) speaks about our freedom as Children of God and states that this freedom is not a condition that is measured against something external such as authority or a deity. This is the mentality of fallen nature where things are fragmented and set against each other: Man against God, brother against brother, an ideology versus another. Rather, freedom is something that we possess because we possess the Spirit of God. God is not something up there that answers our needs from time to time, and the Holy Spirit is not a power bestowed on us to perform some

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particular endeavour. As the eucharistic doxology goes: *“Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit...”* Any prayer from our side is not to Christ but through him etc. because we are assumed into his divinity and our faith, different from moralism, devotional practices, dogmas and regulations, is living this union with God and our fellow human beings.

This reflection, I hope will help us missionaries to set the pace of our spiritual journey and our ministry on Mary’s trajectory. Mary is the first among us to show us the full picture of our vocation. In the meantime *“we who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”* Rm 8:23. But He who wants us to be *“conformed to the image of His Son,”* Rm 8:29 will ultimately justify and glorify us (Rm 8:30) as he did with our mother Mary.

May the loving embrace of the Father continue to be our personal experience, and that of our families and communities.

Blessings



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