



The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 15th August 2021
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“A woman adorned with the sun standing on the moon.”

These past days I have prepared my Podcast on St Maximilian Kolbe whose Feast is on 14th August. He died in Auschwitz Concentration Camp by lethal injection on that day 1941 and was cremated in the camp on 15th August. Some of you who read or hear my Reflection for the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary may have visited Auschwitz and been stirred by the horrors committed there. The true story of Maximilian, a Franciscan Friar standing in for the husband and father of a family who was sentenced to starvation and death because of another prisoner’s escape is very moving, “no greater love has any man than to lay down his life for his friend.” What is not so well known is the Devotion of St Maximilian Kolbe to Mary Immaculate or that he was involved in founding the Militia (Army) of the Immaculate, an organization to spread the Gospel under the Patronage of Mary Immaculate. In fact, it was the work of the Militia Immaculatae in proclaiming the truth of what the Nazis were intent upon that brought him to their attention and led to his imprisonment in Auschwitz. The Militia Immaculatae was committed to bringing the truth of the teaching of the Church to the world and exposing falsehood, especially at that time the works of the Masons. The Monastery at Niepokalanow was at the heart of a City of the Immaculate Mary, and housed some 2000 Jews who were under threat from Nazis.

Maximilian Kolbe saw the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady (proclaimed a Dogma in 1854) not just as something passive but as having an effect through Mary as an active force; something revealed in the Protoevangelium, the first announcement of the Good News in Genesis 3:15 “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she will crush thy head, and thou shalt be in wait for her heel.” Mary is at the center of spiritual combat, not just above it all.

The Gospel for the Solemnity of the Assumption is the Magnificat and highlights Mary’s Faith. She sees God’s plan at work in history: the plan to bring salvation to all and her own unique role in it. Mary in accepting God’s plan for her is a model for us.

Belief in the Assumption goes back to early centuries of church life, though it was not proclaimed a Dogma until 1950 by Pope Pius XII. It is recorded that when St Polycarp was burned alive for his Faith in Smyrna (Ismir in present day Turkey) the Faithful gathered up his ashes and gave thanks, celebrating that fact that he had entered life eternal. This was around the year 150. And, August 15th as the day that Mary was assumed into Heaven was already celebrated in Syria and Palestine by the fifth century (Rome adopted the Feast in the 7th Century). The Dogma teaches that Mary, who was without sin (the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception) was taken body and soul into the glory of Heaven at the moment of her “Dormition”.

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The Second Vatican Council placed its teaching on Our Lady in the context of its Document on the Church. Mary was a Pilgrim as we are, on a journey of Faith, redeemed like us though in a more 'exalted Fashion' says Pollard in his Homily for this Solemnity. He says, quoting chapter 8 of the Document on the Church: "she is the Church's and our outstanding model in faith and charity." He concludes "Mary is every Christian's pattern for the pilgrim way, and for the Assumption that completes it."

The beautiful imagery used by St John in the Book of the Apocalypse reading for 15th August describes Mary's triumph over evil (the dragon equates with the serpent of Genesis). She is the new Eve: "A woman adorned with the sun standing on the moon". It is what the Church, the Bride of Christ, aspires to. The battle described by John goes on; we ask Mary's prayers that through the triumph of Christ's Resurrection and with her intercession, we too may stand alongside her in glory assumed with her into Heaven.

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