

MULIER AMICTA SOLE

***A Homily for the Solemnity of the
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary***

St Augustine's Parish, London.

Texts: Rev. 11:19; 12: 1-6; 10; Ps 44; 1 Cor. 15: 20-26; Luke 1:39-56.

“A woman clothed with the sun.” My dear brothers and sisters, the solemnity we celebrate today is close to the centre of the mystery of our salvation. We are celebrating the Assumption of the Mother of Christ, who is God, and the Mother of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. From very early in the history of the Church, the Fathers of the Church taught about this truth: that the Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven at the end of her earthly life. Following this Tradition, Pope Pius XII, on November 1, 1950, officially declared it to be an article of faith when he taught (*in the Apostolic Constitution, Munificentissimus Deus*): “The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”

The First Reading tells us about the Ark of the Covenant and then about the mysterious woman who is adorned with the sun, standing on the moon and crowned with twelve stars. The mystery we celebrate is one that captures the past, celebrates the present and points to the future.

We are conversant with addressing our Lady as the “Ark of the Covenant” in the Litany of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This helps us to make a link between the ark and the woman clothed with the sun. We know that ancient Ark of the Covenant was holy because of what it stood for, a

sign of God's presence among his people. The ark contained very sacred things. Let us look at it this way: the ark is a sign and a figure of a greater reality that God fulfilled in Christ, the Son of Mary. The ark contained the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written – the sign of the covenant. Mary is the bearer of Jesus, who, on the Cross of Calvary, sealed the New Covenant in his blood. The ark contained the rod of Aaron the high priest. Mary is the bearer of our High priest, who offered himself to free us from sin and eternal death. The ark contained the manna with which the Lord fed his pilgrim people in the desert. Mary is the bearer of the Living Bread from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who in the Holy Eucharist is our food as the new pilgrim people for the journey to eternal life.

The woman clothed with the sun gives birth to a son who will rule the world with an iron scepter. Mary is the Mother of Jesus the universal King, whose kingdom will have no end. The presence of the mysterious dragon reminds us of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. We remember how the Devil in the form of a serpent deceived our mother, Eve and through her the first Adam. It also reminds us of the attempt made by King Herod to kill the Baby Jesus when he was born in Bethlehem. Here, we see the past remembered, the present celebrated and the future foreseen. As it was in the beginning, so it is now and so shall it be unto eternity: the new Eve is with the Second Adam when the serpent, the dragon, the Devil is defeated and the people of God set free.

“A woman clothed with the sun.” The glorious assumption of Mary is part of the mystery of the Resurrection of the one Saviour of humanity. This is the truth that the Apostle Paul teaches us in the Second Reading. It is our anchored hope that we shall rise with Christ on the Last Day. But this

follows a proper order as ordained by the all-knowing God. Because of the prerogatives of Mary, she had to go before us all to where we all hope to be.

The Gospel Reading of today confirms what I have just said. Mary is told that her cousin Elisabeth is pregnant and she goes in a haste to visit her. She greets Elisabeth and two things happen: Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and the child in her womb leaps for joy. We learn these from the mouth of Elisabeth herself. Elisabeth now filled with the Holy Spirit teaches us who Mary is among God's children, ***“Among 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?”*** And then Mary sings the song of praise filled inexhaustible meanings. “The Almighty has done great things for me”, she says. What great things? The Lord chose her from all eternity to be the Mother of Christ, who is true God - who took flesh in the womb of Mary - and became true man and the only Saviour of the human race. In order to be fitting for so holy a task, God gave Mary the special grace of being conceived without original sin, the grace of Immaculate Conception. God gave her, the virgin daughter of Joachim and Ann the grace of conceiving and giving birth to her Son while remaining ever virgin. God gave her the grace of sharing intimately in the life of Christ – as the only one who knows the details of the mysteries of the life of Christ from his birth to his childhood to his “hidden life” to his agony on the Cross to his resurrection. She was always beside the Lord. And she is always beside the Lord. So it is only fitting that she who shared his suffering like the pain of a sword piercing her very soul should be the first among so many to share in the glory of his resurrection and ascension and eternal joy in Heaven.

“A woman clothed with the sun.” On the Cross the Lord made it clear that she who is the Mother of Christ is also the Mother of the followers of Christ. We read in John 19: 26-27 that while hanging on the Cross the Lord addressed his Mother concerning John the Beloved Disciple, “He is your son”. And to the disciple he said, “She is your mother”. On the day of Pentecost, Mary was present among the disciples when the Holy Spirit came down upon them. So, she who was given to John the son of Zebedee was given to all the disciples, then, now and until the end of time. And so Mary is the archetype of the Church, the perfection of the Lord intends the Church to be, who has gone before us to Heaven and there intercedes for us, her children.

O Woman clothed with sun, my Mother and my Queen!

Pray for me, your son; pray for us, your children.

Teach us that your Son is Immanuel – God-with-us.

Teach us that he has the iron scepter, that He is the Omnipotent God.

Teach us that He, Lamb of God has taken away our guilt.

That He the Lion of Judah has conquered and in Him we are more than conquerors. Amen.

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