

Homily on the Feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God

Today is Mary Day, honoring St. Mary the Mother of God for the role she played in God's design and plan to save us. As we pray to her- seeking, asking, honoring and venerating her with thankful hearts, we do so with love, as we would towards our own mothers. To dispel any misunderstanding, we do not worship her; we pray to her and ask her to be a voice for us to God, her Son. Our Church does not place her on a level above but at the center to honor her presence in us. We do this every week at the Badarak. So through her, we are constantly and forever in touch with God.

In fact, we look at her like the heart of our church. Jesus is the Head, the Holy Spirit is the energy. But, as a body needs a head to lead it and guide it, and energy to move it, so it needs a heart to provide for it to live. In this way, St. Mary is our heart and center around whom we gather in weekly prayer. Why? To get the closest we can to Jesus our Lord and God and with Him to Our Father.

St Mary is likened to the chief of police. When we lose our way in life, the saints are there to redirect us by their exemplary lives. And St. Mary first and foremost of saints does this from her appeals to her Son. She hands off our prayers, and then from the Son to the Father.

Her story in our Christian tradition comes both from the written source and oral teachings. Though the origins of her great veneration in the Church are not documented in Scripture with precision as are other things we know, the early Church Fathers St. Justin and Irenaeus saw St. Mary more than just a pious woman, rather a vessel through who God could reveal Himself as he did in Christ THE GOD THE SON. From scripture, St. Mary is honored without question; by Elizabeth her cousin, she greeted her as the *Mother of my Lord*. The Blessed Mother was the center of activity at a wedding in Cana where the miracle of water to wine occurred. Mary pushed the envelope there. She was faithful to the end, standing at the Cross and is even noted in the book of Acts as a member of the first Church on Pentecost, at the heart of the Apostles gathered in the upper room. So, as mothers in our own lives or a constant, so was she in the life of her Son, in the life of Church.

All this is recorded in writings in Greek, Armenian and Syriac and preserved until today. Based on this testimony today's feast was established in the 6th c.; a day to remember when she was bodily assumed into heaven, taken up by her Son. At the time of her death, we believe that this venerable woman who had become the heart of the Church was in the mystery of her Son's promise was translated or taken up into heaven, as we say in Armenian *Verapokhoom*. In a glorified state in body, she ascended to be with her Son and be as St. Paul says *to be with the Lord in the Air*.

This is what will happen to us, at the time when Jesus comes again. Her assumption then is a foretaste of what will occur to us when we remain faithful as did she.

In our church we bless grapes on this day, not peaches, plums and watermelon, but grapes. Why? It is in remembrance of St. Mary who was the vine from which our Lord was born. She is not the means to this end result but in fact the primal giver of life, who without seed gave birth to the flesh and blood that becomes our Holy Communion. As grapes have both flesh, a fiber, water and the juice that becomes the wine, that our Lord Himself used at the Passover, they are blessed both symbolically and sacramentally to become the presence of God with us, in His redeeming blood. Thus we remember Mary, venerate her, honor her, and thank her for bringing God to us, and making it possible for us to get to God.

And so, we gather around her, our Holy Mother, full of grace, and filled with love, warmth of spirit and devotion. And we hear her heart beating loudly as the center of our gathering here today, and as well her voice speaking to our hearts, minds and souls saying as a mother would...*come sit here on my lap and on my knee.* She says, *come be near my Son Jesus, my God and your Savior who has moved to the right hand of God the Father. There is room for you.*

For these reasons every year we hold this day as a special one remembering the power of a woman, whose yes to God, changed the course of history, and let Him come into our lives. Thank you Mother Mary, bearer of God, keep your heart beating for us, saving a place for us on your lap, so we may forever glorify God with you, F. S. and HS.