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THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY: SINLESS BY GRACE, SAVED BY GRACE, ASSUMED BY GRACE

ON THE READINGS FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

August 14, 2017 Carl E. Olson



Top half of "Assumption of the Virgin" (1517) by Rosso Fiorentino [WikiArt.org]

Readings:

- Rev 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab
- Psa 45:10, 11, 12, 16
- 1 Cor 15:20-27
- Lk 1:39-56

On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the doctrine that God the Father chose and prepared a Mother for his only-begotten Son who was “ever absolutely free of all stain of sin, all fair and perfect” and who “would possess that fullness of holy innocence and sanctity than which, under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater...”

On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII declared as dogma the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. His Apostolic Constitution, *Munificentissimus* noted the connection between the two Marian dogmas,

stating that the two “are most closely bound to one another.” It said that God does not usually “grant to the just the full effect of the victory over death until the end of time has come,” but did so with the Assumption, “and as a result she was not subject to the law of remaining in the corruption of the grave, and she did not have to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body.” What does this mean? That just as Mary was kept from original sin by God’s grace, she was also kept from the decay of the grave by that same grace.

Pius XII stated that the image of the woman clothed with the sun, which is part of today’s first reading from the Book of Revelation, has long been understood by the “scholastic Doctors” as signifying “the Assumption of the Virgin Mother of God”. The celebration of the Feast of the Assumption can be traced back to at least the seventh century in both the East and the West. Liturgical developments and theological insights flourished from the seventh to ninth centuries.

Among those insights was the recognition, as Pius XII observed, that Mary—sinless and full of grace, the divine life of God—was uniquely preserved from physical corruption and decay. Her body, in the words of Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., “would not return to dust but would be resuscitated in an anticipated resurrection.” He makes the careful and important distinction between the Ascension of Christ, which occurred by Jesus’ own power, and the Assumption of Mary, who “was lifted up by God to the degree of glory for which she had been predestined.”

While many Protestants object to the dogma of the Assumption (and the Immaculate Conception) because they see it as somehow introducing a competition of sorts between Jesus and his Mother, the exact opposite is the case. Jesus’ love for Mary and her perfect love for Him and her faithful obedience to the Father leads a logical *and* incredible conclusion: “The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son’s Resurrection, and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 966).

Mary, the Mother of God, is also Mother of the Church. She gave physical birth to the unique Son of God who is fully divine and fully human; she now gives spiritual birth to the sons and daughters of God who, filled with the divine life of her Son, are made fully human, really alive, truly divinized (see CCC, 963-970; 1988). Pius XII also wrote of the Virgin Mary as being the new Eve who, “although subject to the new Adam, is most intimately associated with him in that struggle against the infernal foe which ... would finally result in that most complete victory over the sin and death...”

Mary’s cooperation with the saving work of her Son is perfect and whole, and the Assumption is a stamp of approval on her life of humble faith and quiet discipleship. The old Eve failed the test in the Garden, and so returned to dust. But the new Eve willingly accepted the Word of the Lord, embraced the will of the Father, and reciprocated the love of the Holy Spirit. She perfectly shared in the conception, life, and death of her Son, and so also perfectly shared in his Resurrection.



Bottom half of "Assumption of the Virgin" (1517) by Rosso Fiorentino [WikiArt.org](This "Opening the Word" column originally appeared in the August 15, 2010, issue of *Our Sunday Visitor* newspaper.)



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Carl E. Olson is editor of Catholic World Report and Ignatius Insight. He is the author of *Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?*, *Will Catholics Be "Left Behind"?*, co-editor/contributor to *Called To Be the Children of God*, co-author of *The Da Vinci Hoax* (Ignatius), and author of the "Catholicism" and "Priest Prophet King" Study Guides for Word on Fire. He is also a contributor to "Our Sunday Visitor" newspaper, "The Catholic Answer" magazine, "The Catholic Herald", "National Catholic Register", "Chronicles", and other publications.