

August 14, 2017 St. Mary Parish, Kalamazoo 7:00 p.m.

## **Vigil of the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

### **Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Readings**

I'm very grateful to Father James for inviting me to celebrate this Mass in the midst of your parish's 40 Hours Devotion, celebrating your parish's patronal Feast of the Assumption of our dear Mother Mary. As we join with the entire universal Church celebrating this summer-time Holy Day of Obligation, here at St. Mary's, we celebrate the special nearness of our Blessed Mother to this parish community, and pray for her ongoing intercession for all of you, and our entire Diocese.

This Holy Day celebrates one of our most treasured Catholic dogmas regarding our Blessed Mother. We believe that when Mary naturally died, she was supernaturally taken up----that is, "assumed"----into Heaven, soul and body, where she intercedes for us, the Church on Earth, for all time. And so, today's Feast is very important to all of us for two important reasons: first, because all of us, just like Mary was, are mortal, human beings, and in God's good time, just like Mary, our lives in this world will come to a natural end. The second reason is because as our Apostles' Creed teaches us, we believe in the "resurrection of the body and life everlasting."

But, as we consider these two important realities that all human beings share in common, including our Blessed Mother, we also come to recognize in today's Feast that there is one significant difference between Mary, and the rest of us: she didn't have to wait until the Second Coming of Christ at the end of all time for her "resurrection of the body". That wondrous event took place immediately upon her natural death, as she was "assumed", soul and body, into heaven.

Today's Feast focuses a lot of attention on the *bodiliness* of who we are. When we come together here for Mass, and when we focus on our responsibility of how we are living our lives in this world, we focus, naturally, on the spiritual dimension of who we are. Yet, we are human beings----we live in this human, finite, imperfect world, and we should be attuned to how well we take care of our bodies and our souls, for we are one person! And at the same time, we should be quite aware of how we treat other human beings.

We know that the only difference----although it was a major difference----between our Blessed Mother and all the rest of the human race is that she was conceived without original sin. We celebrate that important event on another holy day, the Immaculate Conception. And of course, we realize that a big part of why that is a significant event is because Mary would one day, by the power of the Holy Spirit, conceive God's Son in her womb, and give birth to Jesus, the Savior of the world.

But the other reality that distinguishes Mary from the rest of us is that, through the Grace of God, Mary never chose to sin over the course of her entire human life. And so she lived an absolutely pure and holy life throughout all her years in this world. Therefore, none of the corrupting power of sin was ever at work within her soul or her body, which I'm sure contributed to the fact that God then could "assume" her body and soul immediately into heaven.

In today's Second Reading from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we heard him ask a profoundly important question about death which will come to each of us mortal beings: *"Where O Death is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?"* He then goes on to remind us that Jesus has conquered the power of sin and death; that Jesus is the Victor over all. That is why Paul can go on with the great prayer of thanksgiving: *"Thanks be to God Who gives US the victory throughout our Lord Jesus Christ."*

And so, as we celebrate this beautiful Feast of Mary's Assumption, we realize how important it is for us to do everything we can to live holy lives in this world---to keep trying to open ourselves to God's Grace so that we too can choose, as consistently as possible, to avoid the corrupting and destructive power of sin in our lives.

Today's Feast also should encourage us to recommit ourselves to have a renewed respect and dignity for ALL human life----the precious "bodiliness" of all human beings. There are several real-life examples taking place in our country and our world that should give us all reason to reflect, and pray for changes of heart within us all.

The events that took place the last several days in Charlottesville, Va., where there has been such an awful, and tragic, encounter between different groups of people, holding different views rooted in racism, hatred, and violence, have very

sadly resulted in deaths and injuries to the people there, and further reflects the great divide within our country----those are the very visible effects of sin.

Our world is also at a point of great danger as different countries try to threaten one another with the potentially catastrophic power of nuclear warfare, once again the effects of the sins of humanity at work among us.

On this very day, the Vigil of the Assumption, as the Church earlier today celebrated the Feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe, we can't help but remember the horrific events of the Holocaust as the unimaginable happened with more than six million people were killed/murdered because of racism and hatred, while the rest of the world watched. Out of that awful event, however, comes the shining example of St. Maximilian Kolbe who traded his life for the sake of a young husband and father so he could live. St. Maximilian Kolbe who loved Jesus, and who found tremendous courage in the Fiat of our Blessed Mother, whose Feast we celebrate today.

It is our faith, in her Assumption and, as the Apostles Creed sums it up: "believing...in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting" that enables us to make Mary's Magnificat our own Prayer of Praise: *"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for He has looked with favor on (each of us, His lowly servants)."*

And so, on this very important, summer Holy Day of Obligation, let us be filled with confidence knowing that our Dear Mother Mary intercedes for us at the Heavenly Throne of Jesus, and that she continues to call us to come through her to her Son to find the answers to all life's challenges in saying Yes to Jesus. May we continue living good and holy lives in this world, even as we keep looking forward to the day when we will experience the fullness of life when our souls will be reunited with our glorified bodies in the life of the world to come. Amen.

God bless you, now and always!