

Feast of the Assumption of Mary-2024

Today we celebrate that at the end of her earthly life, Mary was taken body and soul into heaven. The preface to the Eucharistic prayer captures “why” her Assumption took place: “For today the Virgin Mother of God was assumed into heaven as the beginning and image of your Church’s coming to perfection and a sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people; rightly you would not allow her to see the corruption of the tomb since from her own body she marvelously brought forth your incarnate Son, the Author of all life.”

As I reflected upon this Feast, I was struck in a new and deeper way, by the dignity of our bodies. You know what is really awesome? Our bodies will eventually share in the life of heaven. We will have a glorified one. Since they are so important in eternity, they are meant to be important for us now. Unfortunately, there has been a tendency at various periods in the life of the Church for it to be viewed in some unfortunate and erroneous ways. It has been referred to as corrupt, inherently evil, the prison of the soul, or simply unimportant. Have we

consciously or unconsciously been affected by this mentality?

The Good News is the Sacred Scriptures have a much more positive and affirming view of the body. The Bible reveals that we were created to be an embodied spirit, or a union of body and soul. That distinguishes us from angels who are pure spirit. In the Book of Genesis, our bodies are seen as “very good” because they come into existence through the will of our Creator. Through the act of creation, God pours His love, His very self, into everything that He has made. Therefore, our bodies are a manifestation of God’s beauty, wisdom, and power. They are amazing in their capacity to heal and adapt to whatever we put them through. As the Psalmist proclaims, “We are fearfully and wonderfully made.”

St. Paul describes the body as the “temple of the Holy Spirit” because we become “living tabernacles of God” through Baptism. The ultimate revelation of the dignity of our bodies is that Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, took one for Himself in the person of Jesus. Not only that, Jesus in His Risen glory, continually gives

us His body in the Eucharist, by coming into our very own body and soul.

Our bodies are a living sacrament. A sacrament is when the Risen Christ makes Himself present, in a manner we can experience with our senses such as bread, wine, water, oil, or another person. It is only through our bodies that we encounter other people, and they encounter us. Therefore, it is through the body that we become the living sacrament of Jesus's loving and merciful presence in the world.

One of the things that make us unique as Catholic Christians, is the centrality of our sacramental view of reality. This perspective unites the material and spiritual and celebrates them both as good and sacred. It leads us to proclaim that heaven and earth are filled with His glory. It reveals that God can be experienced through everyone and everything He has made, and that all of it is good, including our bodies. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, "Earth is crammed with heaven. And every bush afire with God. But only He who sees takes off his shoes."

What are some practical ramifications that flow from the great dignity of the body? First, it invites us to become friends with our bodies by realizing that they are good and an essential part of who we are. In fact, we would not be ourselves without our bodies. Therefore, we begin to look at them in a more loving and merciful manner. We celebrate their beauty and grandeur. We will never have the perfect body, but we can cherish the one we have, by focusing on those parts that we rejoice in and making peace with the ones we struggle with or reject. It has been said, “Divine perfection is precisely the ability to include what seems imperfect.” Our body acceptance and celebration will go a long way in bringing us peace of mind and a deeper sense of well-being.

The second ramification is that it leads us to be good stewards of our bodies by taking care of and improving them through proper diet, exercise, rest, lifestyle choices, listening to them, and getting an annual checkup, or as needed. On the other hand, our Catholic faith encourages us to resist the temptation of the “cult of the body” where we become overly preoccupied and obsessed with the appearance and perfection of our

bodies. With this mentality, our bodies consume our time and attention, and become the ultimate foundation of our identity. Even though our bodies are “really good,” that is a shaky foundation for our ultimate sense of self-worth.

The third ramification is that it leads us to respect our bodies, to require others to do so, respect the bodies of other people, and to care for others in their bodily needs. We have a growing spiritual awareness that our bodies and the bodies of others are truly “holy ground.”

The fourth ramification is that it influences “how” we eat. When we eat, we do not do it just because it is necessary for nutrition, health, survival, or to take away our hunger pangs. Instead, we view it as one of the simple joys of life, as we experience God’s vast array of culinary delights. We make it an unforgettable and pleasurable experience by eating and drinking in moderation, while savoring it all along the way. In this way, we give glory to God through our bodies.

As we grow in our love for Christ, we are even inspired to take care of our bodies so that we love and serve the Lord with greater health, vitality, and longevity. The

dignity of our bodies never decreases, even when we experience sickness and suffering; chronic, even life-threatening health conditions; disabilities; deformities; paralysis; or the significant effects of the aging process. St. Paul calls us to glorify God in our bodies. We can do so both in sickness and in health. In health, by honoring, taking care of, and improving our bodies. In sickness, by getting proper medical treatment and following the doctor's directives. We also have the opportunity to unite our bodily sufferings to those of Jesus Christ, for our sanctification and salvation, and that of the whole world.

By properly attending to our needs of both body and soul, we are living a full human life and working out our eternal salvation. May we come to love and cherish our bodies just as much as God does. In doing so, we glorify and thank our Creator. And remember, since we are unity of body and soul, taking care of our bodies is good for the soul.

