

HOMILY ASSUMPTION BVM [20B] 2015

On these Sundays of August we're reading St John's Gospel. Reading the famous chapter 6. But not this week! Our Lady's great feast of the Assumption replaces the Sunday. So will that stop us thinking about the Eucharist? No. Two Sundays ago I spoke about the wonderful *continuity* of the Mass. How our celebration of Mass rolls the years away and takes us right back to the Last Supper. Last Sunday we thought about the *sacrifice* of the Mass and how it makes us present on Calvary. But what about this Sunday? How can we think about the Eucharist when we're celebrating this solemnity of Our Blessed Lady? The answer is, this day gives us a *wonderful opportunity* to speak about the Eucharist and Our Lady.

Let's explore together today's first reading. It's from the Book of the Apocalypse – the last book in the Bible. We're handicapped in a way because we're taking just a small part of the Book of the Apocalypse. We can't really understand the Book of the Apocalypse unless we see it as a whole. And the key to understanding the Book of the Apocalypse is – the Mass! The Mass is the liturgy of heaven on earth. The Mass explains the Book of the Apocalypse and the Book of the Apocalypse throws so much light on the Mass. [cf The Lamb's Supper, The Mass as Heaven on Earth, by Scott Hahn, 1999]

Pope St John Paul made that very point. He wrote: “The Eucharist [the Mass] ... reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven ... the prayers honour Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, [they honour] the angels, the holy apostles, the glorious martyrs and all the saints. This is an aspect of the Eucharist which merits greater attention: in celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb, we are united to the heavenly “liturgy” and become part of that great multitude which cries out: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” (*Rev* 7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* para.19)

So let’s take the part of the Book of the Apocalypse we’ve heard this morning. Straightaway we can see where we are and what we’re doing. Where are we? “The sanctuary of God in heaven opened.” We are in the presence of God. And what are we doing? We are worshipping, praising God; we’re joining in the liturgy of the Church; we’re joining in the sacrifice Jesus left us; we’re joining in the Eucharist.

And we are not on our own. Pope St John Paul said, “The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth.” So who is here with us? Our Lady is: the Woman adorned with the sun – the Ark of the Covenant. “The sanctuary of God in heaven opened, and the Ark of the Covenant could be seen inside it.” [Bis] Does that sentence come as a

shock to us? It should! But maybe we don't appreciate what the Ark of the Covenant is?

The Ark of the Covenant was a beautiful thing. It was made in the time of Moses. The Ark was carried around with the Chosen People as they made their way to the Promised Land. Finally, it was enshrined in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. But Solomon's Temple was destroyed and the Ark of the Covenant disappeared. When the Book of the Apocalypse was written, the Ark had not been seen for 600 years. And here is St John saying, "The sanctuary of God in heaven opened, and the Ark of the Covenant *could be seen* inside it." And St John goes on immediately to say, "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman, adorned with the sun ... and ... she was with child." 'The Ark of the Covenant' and 'the woman with child'. Who is this woman? She is the one "who brought a male child into the world, the son who was to rule all the nations ..." The child is Jesus. The mother is Mary. Here in the Book of the Apocalypse St John deliberately brings together the Ark of the Covenant and Mary.

What was the Ark of the Covenant for? It revealed that God was present. The Ark contained the Ten Commandments - the Law inscribed by God on tablets of stone. It also contained a jar of the manna - the miraculous bread that fed the Chosen People on their way through the desert. It also contained Aaron's rod - Aaron's rod that blossomed as a sign that he was High Priest.

The Law – the manna – and the symbol of priesthood. What does Mary hold – Our Blessed Lady whom we salute as the Ark of the New Covenant? The old Ark contained the Word of God written in stone. Mary contained in her womb the *Divine Word of God* who became man and lived among us. The old Ark contained manna. Mary contained the ‘*Living Bread* come down from heaven’. The old Ark contained the rod of the High Priest Aaron. Mary contained the *eternal High Priest*, her Son and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Word of God is Jesus, and the Ark in whom he lives is Mary his Mother.

And on Calvary “there stood by the cross of Jesus Mary his Mother.” She suffered deeply with Him. She “joined herself to his sacrifice in her mother’s heart.” (2nd Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* no.58) As he died on the cross, Jesus gave her to us as our mother. When he was taken down from the cross she took his lifeless body in her arms. She “received Christ’s sacrifice for the whole Church.” Every time we are at Mass therefore we also turn to her. (cf Pope Benedict XVI *Sacramentum caritatis* No.33)

Let’s go back to the words of Pope St John Paul I quoted earlier: “The Eucharist reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven ... in celebrating this sacrifice [of the Lamb], we are united with the heavenly “liturgy” and become part of that great multitude which cries out: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to

the Lamb!" (*Rev* 7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth." (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* para.19) Our Lady is very much part of that heavenly scene.

Mary's Assumption, body and soul into heaven, is a sign of sure hope to us. The Eucharist [the Mass] promises heaven to us. Mary is already there. She already enjoys in heaven what her Son's sacrifice has won for her and for us. Yes, all generations *will* call her blessed. The Almighty has done great things for her – and for us as well!