

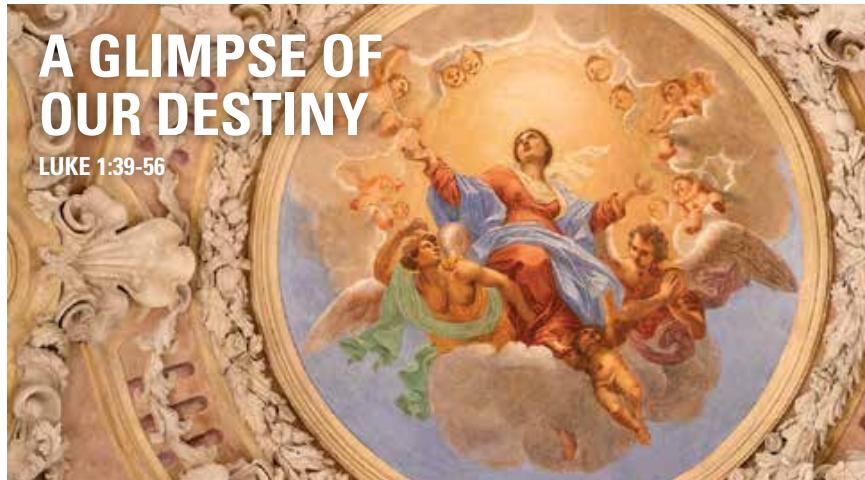
15 AUGUST 2021

Sunday Message

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

THE WORD

Year B • Season Colour: White • Psalter Week 4



Teofilo Polacco's ceiling fresco of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Chiesa di Santa Maria Assunta, Riva del Garda, Italy

We all know the story of Mary of Nazareth. We know the indispensable role she played in God's plan for humanity, how she made it possible. Christians have honoured Mary from the Church's earliest days.

So many feasts have been established in her honour, so many church buildings named for her, so many religious congregations called after her. Mary has been given so many titles – Mother of God, Mother of the Church, Madonna, Queen of Heaven, Mother of Perpetual Help, Immaculate Conception – the list goes on.

Today we celebrate one of the great Marian feasts. The doctrine of the Assumption of Mary was promulgated by Pope Pius XII in 1950. It declares that Mary, "having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory". This teaching is an acknowledgement of Mary's singular role in the story of salvation. It is also a promise – that if we follow the example of Mary, if we seek always to say 'yes' to God as she did, then we too can look forward to life in God's presence forever. ■

REFLECT

Henri Nouwen was a Dutch priest and academic who taught at Yale and Harvard universities in the 1970s and 80s. He was well known for his books on spirituality and for his reflections on his mental health struggles. After her defeat in the 2016 US presidential election, Hillary Clinton says she turned to one of his books, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, for comfort in her grief. Nouwen's wisdom has been a gift to many.

But even though he had gained tremendous success as a writer and academic, Nouwen began to feel that something was missing in his life. He sensed that God was calling him in a different direction. Having prayed about it, he finally found himself joining the L'Arche community, a charity that cares for those with intellectual and developmental needs. Henri Nouwen, this deep-thinking writer and professor,

this world-renowned spiritual guru, spent his final years bathing those who could not bathe themselves, feeding those who could not feed themselves, celebrating the sacraments with them, and seeing in them the beautiful face of Christ.

Like Mary the mother of Jesus, Henri Nouwen listened to God at work in his life and responded to it to the best of his ability. He heard the Word of God and kept it. Nouwen felt a profound connection to Mary's simplicity and humanity. In one of his journals, he describes meeting a priest who summed up Mary's meaning to the world: "To look at Mary," the priest said, "is to see God's original plan for humanity." "In her," Nouwen wrote, "we see the way God wanted us to be... Mary shows us how to receive the marvellous gift of God's love, and how to respond to God's redemptive action in our lives."

This is what we celebrate on the feast of the Assumption of Mary. If Mary shows us "God's original plan for humanity", so does her Assumption into heaven. In the Assumption, preserved forever before the face of God, freed from the corruption of the grave, Mary not only fulfils her destiny – but also offers us a glimpse of our destiny, too. Assumption is what God wants for us. Heaven is what God dreams for us. This is God's desire and design for us.

Today's feast reminds us of that promise – and that hope. We are called to model ourselves on the Mother of God – in her holiness, humility and humanity. If we want to reach heaven, if we are to claim our destiny, we must "listen to the word of God and keep it". That means, very simply, to live like Mary; to desire, like her, to bring the Word into the world; to birth Jesus every day, by all we say and do. ■

SAY

"Lord, thank you for giving me Mary as my mother and model. Help me to follow her example so that I may share in her Son's resurrection. Amen."

PRAY

Many of us grew up in homes where the Rosary was said every day. Pray the Rosary today, focusing especially on Mary's glorious Assumption into heaven.

LEARN

On the feast of the Assumption of Mary, we celebrate our belief that the Mother of Jesus was taken up, body and soul, into heaven, where she enjoys eternal life in the company of her Son. It is a joyful feast because it points to what we believe will be our destiny. We believe that what God has done for Mary, God will do for us also – that at the end of time God will raise our mortal bodies and bring us into the fullness of his presence forever.

DO

Rejoice in good news.

Heaven is promised to all who fix their eyes on Jesus.

Ponder the joy and peace of the saints in heaven.