



Tracts for Our Times

The Assumption of Our Lady

The Patronal Feast of South Africa

Tract 2

August
2009

The Assumption of Our Lady, body and soul into heaven, was proclaimed a dogma of the Church in 1950 by Pope Pius XII, and while this is an article of faith that the Church has always held, there was much consternation among some circles as to its meaning and relevance at that time.

“There are more important things to worry about,” they said. “Why should we waste time and energy on such an obscure doctrine that has so little to do with modern life, and that is yet another obstacle in the path of ecumenical dialogue?” One more example of how out of touch the Catholic Church is!

Perhaps the clue to the relevance of the Assumption for us lies in the context of Pope Pius’ defining it as dogma. By 1950, the twentieth century had already seen two horrific wars – the first and second world wars – both in their turn called the War to End All Wars. How many millions of young soldiers – men in the prime of their lives – on both sides died at the whim of politicians? How many were used as mere cannon fodder so that an army might advance a few metres a day?

The First World War was fought in the trenches, a gruesome and blood way of fighting a war, where the dead were described as the “lucky ones” – lucky because they would never have to live with the memories of those battles.

The Second World War saw six million Jews, and a million or more priests, religious, Gypsies, homosexuals, in fact, anyone to whom the Nazis turned their hatred, put to death – not for what they did, but for who they were.

In concentration camps, people were treated worse than animals, and no doubt anyone who has seen photographs of the camps agrees. The most horrific medical experiments were conducted on the disabled, the elderly, the mentally retarded, on children. There was unparalleled brutality. Unimaginable pain.



That war ended with the atomic bomb, and the fear of the coming nuclear arms race and the Cold War. The atomic bomb proved that there was no limit to the destruction man could inflict. For the first time in history, mankind had the power to destroy the world.

Life was cheap. The world was disillusioned, grey, bleak, depressed, horrified and terrified. Humanity had been dehumanised.

Pope Pius XII wanted to give dignity and humanity back to mankind. By solemnly defining the Assumption of Our Lady, he did just that.

The Dogma of the Assumption shows us our true humanity, our true dignity. A human body—a body that had brought our Saviour into this world—was taken up into the glory of heaven, into the very presence of God. The human body, that in 1950 seemed so worthless, was exalted and glorified.

The power and love of God shines forth in the Assumption. The triumph of Our Lord over death, over sin, over pain, over evil, is vividly demonstrated to us in Mary, and we are shown our *true destiny*, our *final goal*. At the end of time, we too will be taken body and soul, into the Kingdom of God, into our Father's house.

What a symbol of hope the Assumption is for us, reminding us that God's promises have been fulfilled, and the goal of our lives is to be happy with God for eternity in heaven.

As much as that symbol was needed in 1950, so to it is needed in our world today. Our humanity, our dignity, is threatened still by war, by suffering, by man's inhumanity to man.

Abortion, euthanasia, murder, violence – life is cheap. The greatest gift we have been given is discarded like yesterday's rubbish.

Pornography, promiscuity, drugs, rape, child abuse – these things rob us of our inherent dignity, our beauty as human persons. We live in fear – fear of terrorism, of crime, of violence and hatred. We see each other as objects to be used and then tossed away.

How much we need to be reminded of who we really are and for what we are destined? How much do we need to be reminded that Christ has triumphed over the Lord of this World, has put his enemies under his feet?

“ The greatest gift we have been given is discarded like yesterday's rubbish. ”

As the voice from heaven in the first reading for the Feast of the Assumption cried out: “Victory and power and empire for ever have been won by our God, and all authority for his Christ” (Rev 12:10).

And it is Christ’s victory. The Assumption of Mary, and, indeed, her Immaculate Conception, were not Mary’s doing. These glorious events in the Life of Our Blessed Mother were the result of the victory that Christ won on the Cross.

Mary herself – the model of humility – tells us this herself, when in response to Elisabeth’s praise she responds with the praise of God, the Magnificat, that beautiful hymn that we find in Luke’s Gospel (1:46-55), and that the Church sings with Mary every evening in the Divine Office.

The same pope who defined Mary’s Assumption into Heaven gave her, under that title, to South Africa as our patroness. In the years that followed, man’s inhumanity to man was again demonstrated here in our country. Apartheid, hatred, discrimination. Many of our people suffered, not for what they did but for who they were. Many were treated as less than human, as being of less worth and dignity than others – and why? Because it became, by object of law, necessary to avoid embracing the fullness of humanity in all its forms.

Who better to have as Patroness than Our Lady Assumed into Heaven – that great sign in the heavens of the glory of God and of the triumphant dignity of the human person?

Mary was taken up to heaven because she was the Mother of the Redeemer, because she believed that the promise made by the Lord would be fulfilled. She is the faithful disciple, who conformed her will totally to the will of God. And she was taken up to heaven to intercede for us here on earth, and to be a symbol of hope for us, an image of the final destiny of the Church and of us all.

“ **Victory and power and empire for ever have been won by our God, and all authority for His Christ.** ”

Let us ask her to join her prayers with ours that we may conform our lives to the will of God, that we may realise our true dignity as human beings, that the victory of Christ may shine forth in the world and in our country, and that the human spirit may rise above all that seeks to push it down.

We look forward to the day when we too will be taken into the glory of God’s presence, where we will – together with Mary – sing for all eternity “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for the Almighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His Name!” ✠

THE MAGNIFICAT

Luke 1:46-55

*My soul glorifies the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.
He looks on his servant in her lowliness;
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.*

*The Almighty works marvels for me.
Holy his name!
His mercy is from age to age,
on those who fear him.*

*He puts forth his arm in strength
and scatters the proud-hearted.
He casts the mighty from their thrones
and raises the lowly.*

*He fills the starving with good things,
sends the rich away empty.*

*He protects Israel, his servant,
remembering his mercy,
the mercy promised to our fathers,
to Abraham and his sons for ever.*



*“The following Tracts were published with the object of contributing something
towards the practical revival of doctrines held by the great divines of our faith.”*

This was the intention of Cardinal Newman and his companions
(known as the Oxford Tractarians) when they began publishing their *Tracts for the Times*.

The Port Elizabeth Oratory, faithful to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church
and the spirit of Saint Philip Neri, hope to contribute something to the
faith and understanding of the People of God in Port Elizabeth,
conforming their hearts and minds ever more closely to the Person of Jesus Christ.