

The Assumption
Eighth Day of the Novena
May 18, 2020

Today I would like to focus on the fourth Glorious mystery of the Rosary, the Assumption. Today we recall how Mary was taken up into heaven, body and soul. I like this mystery because it gives me an opportunity to preach about heaven. I am reminded of the little anecdote about the priest who, while giving a homily to children seated around the altar, asked them what you had to do to get to heaven. One of the kids said, "You have to die first." Of course he was right.

We should not be afraid of death. Here is one of the most beautiful true stories I ever heard. A little boy had a terminal illness. He knew he was dying. One day he asked his mother, "Mom what's it like to die? Will it hurt?" The mother thought for a moment as she searched for an answer to his question, then said, "Jimmy, do you remember when you used to play with your friends all day? You'd be so tired that when we'd sit around and watch TV afterwards, you'd fall asleep in the chair with your clothes on. Well, that wasn't where you belonged, but in the morning you always woke up where you did belong -- in your own bed. Your Dad carried you up the stairs, into your room, and tucked you into your own bed where you belonged." She continued: "I think that's what death is like. It's like waking up some morning and finding ourselves in another room, in the place where we belong, in heaven, safe in the loving arms of Jesus." What a beautiful analogy! Dying is like going to sleep somewhere here on earth and waking up in heaven!

According to a beautiful little legend, one day Jesus made a tour of heaven just to make sure that everything was in order. Everything was fine. Then on one of the side streets he encountered people who seemed to have no business being in heaven at that time. They should have been serving a long period in purgatory. He stormed out to the gate where Peter was checking in the new arrivals. Jesus said, "Simon Peter, what has been going on here?" Peter said, "What have I done now?" Jesus said, "You let a lot of people in that don't belong." "I didn't do it," said Peter. Jesus asked: "Well, then, who did?" Peter said: "You won't like it." Jesus said: "Tell me anyway." "Well," said Peter, "I turn them away from the front gate and then they go around to the back gate and your mother lets them in!" Yes, it's just a fable, but I really believe that Mary, our Blessed Mother, helps a lot of people to get into heaven. How often we pray the Hail Mary and say, "Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." I really believe that Mary hears our prayer and that at the hour of our death she does pray to Jesus for us, that she leads us to our new home in heaven.

Concert violinist Itzhak Perlman says that before he was four years old two things happened to shape his future in an irreversible way: he was stricken with polio, and he heard a recording of the violinist Jascha Heifetz. The polio took away his legs, but Heifetz's music gave him a dream that set him on the road to musical greatness. Itzhak Perlman had a dream of becoming a concert violinist. That kept him going in the midst of his suffering. I'll tell you what keeps me going in the midst of my personal sufferings. I have a dream of someday being welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven where there will be no more suffering. I have a dream of once again being united with my mom and dad and brother, and so many other loved ones and confreres whom I miss so much.

Now why did I choose this topic to talk about at this time during the pandemic? Well, many, many people have already died of this virus and many more will continue to do so. Let us pray that they all have, or will have, received comfort knowing that death here in this life means a life in heaven for all eternity, that they will be in a place where there will be no more sickness. They will be in a place where there will be no more social distances. They will be there with Jesus, our Blessed Mother and their loved ones for all eternity.

O MARY CONCEIVED WITHOUT SIN, PRAY FOR US WHO HAVE RECOURSE TO THEE.