

Homily - Assumption of our Lady

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Directly opposite my old seminary college, in the Major Papal Basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Walls in Rome is a raised altar and a huge painting which occupy the entire right transept (the cross bar) of the basilica. The raised altar to Our Lady is made of the most beautiful precious green malachite stone donated after 1825 by Tsar Nicholas I of Russia. That's right. The Russian Orthodox Tsar of Russia donated all the precious tonnes of altar stones to the Roman Catholic Basilica of St. Paul. Why? Because by the efforts of St. Paul the faith spread west to Greece and then into Russia. Why? Because Our Lady now in many cases has at least as much prominence in that separated Eastern Church as she does in our Western Catholic Church.

The magnificent painting of Our Lady spreads upwards metres above the altar, bigger than most frescoes. In classic Eastern and Catholic tradition that has been handed on unbroken for 2,000 years, Our Lady is represented in "The Dormition", that is the sleep. She fell asleep in the Lord. She was buried by humans but God never allowed her to corrupt physically, because her soul was already preserved from all spiritual corruption of original sin. Her dormitory is immediately, and always has been, Heaven. God's messenger the archangel Gabriel said to her "Hail Mary Full of Grace". No vice, just pure, perfect spiritual virtue: Grace. So you gaze at the painting, and the Apostles stand around Mary's stone sarcophagus and the earthly lid is off. Only beautiful red roses of the Passion and white lilies of virginal purity remain in the grave. The Blessed Trinity, the Father who made her, the Son she bore and the Holy Spirit she was filled with, lift her into their eternal home, so that where her soul always was, so too her body is also, now crowned in glory; she is not sleeping but eternally alive.

Across the Tiber River, Tras-Tevere, from my old seminary college in Rome at the Papal Basilica of Our Lady in Trastevere is a domed mosaic of stones and gilt gold crowning the apse and high altar of the Basilica of Santa Maria. There depicted is Jesus sitting on his heavenly throne, but it is a wide throne, like a lover's bench. Jesus has his right arm proudly wrapped lovingly around his mother. Jesus is so proud of his mum. "That's my mum!" Jesus looks down to you saying: "See, We have assumed my mum into her rightful place in the eternal tabernacle of Heaven." "That's right. She bore me in the pure tabernacle of her womb. Now I have crowned her beside me in my eternal, unbounded tabernacle, Heaven. She is the greatest messenger I have been sending to you. Finally, you got the message and declared the dogma of the Assumption, that you my Church, from East lung to West lung had known from the beginning. You got the Holy Breath of my heavenly logic. You spoke it to all generations, as my mum is blessed to all generations."

The belief and submission of Mary (and of her Son), Mary of Grace, the Son being Grace Himself, to the Father is the witness of our faith that enables the Immaculate Conception, the birth of the Impeccable Son, the death and Resurrection of Him who is all life, being and existence itself. In the Assumption she who is FULL of Grace is rewarded by sitting beside He who is ALL Grace. Our Church never confuses this, even if the devil likes others to be confused. Mary is full of Grace. Jesus is all Grace, the source and origin of all Grace. Let us pray that our acceptance to God's will of Grace will also lead us to the freedom of Grace Mary enjoys in joy forever. Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy. Blessed be her Holy and Immaculate Conception. Blessed be her Glorious Assumption. Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother. It is because of her glorious Assumption that Our Lady is able to pray for us now and at the hour of our death. She who was preserved from the effects of original sin was preserved not from death (her Son even had our death, had to have it in order to save us). But she is preserved also from the *effects* of death and lives in Heaven. Our Lady, Assumed into Heaven, PRAY FOR US.

Additional notes.

The name of the Archangel Gabriel means "God is strong". The name Mary means "loved by Yahweh" or "Yahweh is my Lord". (Archbishop of Sydney, Benedictine John Bede Polding was there in St. Paul's Outside the Walls when it was rededicated after the 1825 fire. His name is engraved on the apse wall.)



St. Paul's Major Papal Basilica Rome. Right Transept. Malachite Altar of Our Lady's Dormition and Assumption. The Apostles look at her empty earthly sarcophagus filled only with red roses and white lilies while in Heaven above Our Lord crowns the Assumed Blessed Mother



Apse Mosaic (and detail of the hands), Papal Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome. Our Lady has been Assumed body and soul into Heaven. Jesus puts His right arm around her. Mary points to her Son: Three fingers for Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and two fingers for the Incarnation made possible through her, Jesus, true God and true man, born of her but of and Being God come down to earth. They are reunited eternally in the Assumption into Heavenly Glory.

