

The Assumption 2017.

Today's feast of the Assumption is one of the older feasts we have in honour of Our Lady, but also one of the newest ones, meaning that it has a long history before it was finally accepted as a dogma or teaching of the Catholic Church.

Scripture tells us nothing about Mary after her being gathered with the Apostles on the original feast of Pentecost, where her prayers would have played an important part in the coming and descent of the Holy Spirit.

We are not sure whether she died in Jerusalem or in Ephesus. Both places lay claim to her dying there. The claims of Ephesus are based on the words of Jesus spoken from the Cross, where he commits Mary to the care of St. John, who definitely died in Ephesus. The claims of Jerusalem rest on the tradition of the ancient Eastern churches, which celebrated the feast of the Dormition (or going to sleep) of Mary already in the 4th century, and icons depicting that occasion go back to that era.

According to their tradition Our lady died naturally in her sleep and her body was buried in a tomb in Jerusalem. Some of the apostles were absent when she died, so when they arrived some time later they wished to pay their respects to Mary and pray at her tomb, but when the tomb was opened her body was no longer there. An old icon shows this as the apostles gathered around the place where her body had been laid, while in the background there is, very large, a figure of Christ holding a miniature figure of Mary, dressed in white burial or Baptism clothes, indicating that her Son had taken her to himself both body and soul.

Important in the development of this feast is what we heard from St. Paul in our second reading today. There he lets us know, in no uncertain terms, that as descendants of Adam everyone dies, Christ included, but that through the Resurrection Christ's power to overcome death is shared with all of humankind. That teaching could and should be applied to Mary in the first place, and that is what the Church finally defined as a teaching of the Church, when in 1950 Pope Pius XII declared officially that Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven.

For us it means that as faithful disciples of Jesus that same glory is laid up for us as well. By living in obedience to God, and welcoming the Word into our hearts, as Mary did, we also can draw close to her Son, following her lead, and living like her, the life of true disciples.

May God find us so.