

## THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

### 15<sup>th</sup> August

The gospel reading is from Luke's account of the Visitation. Mary has just been told by the angel Gabriel that she is to conceive and bare a son and she is given a sign, 'Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth also, in her old age, herself conceived a son...' Mary sets out to visit her aged relation who, prompted by the Spirit, asks the question when greeted by Mary, 'Why should I be visited by the mother of my Lord?' This shows her respect for her young relative because what she carries in her womb makes her 'the mother of my Lord.' The first reading gives us a vision of a woman (Mary) whose child is attacked by a dragon (the devil). The second reading gives Paul's teaching on the fact of the resurrection.

The **First Reading** is from the Book of the Apocalypse (Greek) or Revelation (English). It is a revelation of hidden things, particularly of hidden events in the future. The authors of apocalyptic writings may be considered the successors of the prophets; they heard the Word of God and passed it on by word of mouth, whereas apocalyptic writers were given revelation in a dream and passed it on in writing. The language of this writing is richly symbolic and the importance of the visions which are described is never in their immediate literal meaning. The imagery must be appreciated at its true value and we must do our best to translate the symbols back into the ideas which the author intended them to convey. This type of writing became very popular in the two centuries before Christ, the visions of Ezekiel and Zechariah paving the way, and was fully developed by 165 BC when the book of Daniel was written. The authorship was attributed to John, the apostle, by writers in the West, while those in the East did not hold this view. The book is dated about 95 AD with parts written at the end of the sixties AD. The book is first and foremost a tract for the times, a period of disturbance and bitter persecution, to increase the hope and determination of the infant Church. This hope is based on the belief in the great 'Day of Yahweh' spoken of by the prophet Amos 5.18. The 'Day' is coming soon when God will liberate his people from their oppressors. When John wrote the Church had been decimated by persecution, Rome and its empire (The Beast) was only a tool wielded by Satan. The book portrays the basic realities on which faith relies in any period of history; God's promise to be with his people. It is this presence that has now been perfected by the marriage of God and his new chosen people in the person of his Son, Immanuel (God-with-us). The promise of the risen Christ, 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time,' is what gives life to the Church.

The reading, 11.19-12.1-6,10 begins with a vision of the ark of the covenant in heaven, this is the new covenant the permanent home of God's presence among his people. We now have the vision of the woman, crowned with stars, who is 'in the pangs of childbirth.' Then a second sign in the heavens, a red dragon who, in Jewish tradition, represented the power of evil, hostile to God and his people. The dragon reeks havoc in the heavens and is ready to eat the child the woman is about to bear. The woman is delivered of a boy, the Messiah, leader of the new Israel, who 'was taken straight up to God and to his throne.' The child's triumph is here described immediately after its birth. The woman escapes to the desert the traditional Old Testament place of refuge for the persecuted. The reading ends with a proclamation from heaven of victory over the dragon which is what the child was born to achieve.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 44. 10-12,16, is a royal wedding song which in Jewish/Christian tradition celebrates the marriage of the messianic king with Israel/the Church. On this feast the words are applied to the woman, our Lady, who gave birth to the One who has been taken up into heaven to sit at God's right hand.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, marriage and virginity, liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, charisms, matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to turn use all these problems into a vehicle for the profound doctrine of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross which is the one true wisdom.

The reading, 15.20-26, is from the chapter in which Paul teaches about the resurrection from the dead. Paul compares Christ with Adam who brought death so 'all die in Adam.' Christ by his resurrection overcame death 'so in Christ all will be brought to life' that is, a risen life in justice and love. When the end comes Christ with all those who belong to him will hand over is kingdom to God the Father having destroyed all forces hostile to the sovereignty of God.