

Homily for The Assumption, Sunday August 15th 2021

My great friend Fr Ernesto Cardenal who died last year, used to say to me when I sent him a copy of a homily, 'Bernardo, unite heaven and earth.' Sometimes he would say, 'too much heaven, not enough earth.' I thought of him with a smile when I was thinking of the readings for the Assumption which takes the place of the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, because this feast invites us to think of the earthly Mary of Luke's gospel and also of the 'heavenly' Mary, who because of her unique relationship with her son as his Mother, we believe is already sharing eternal life with the God who took the risk of inviting her to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in conceiving and giving birth to God's Son. Luke gives us such a powerful portrayal of the Annunciation which sees Mary go through the emotions of disturbance, fear and questioning but, ultimately saying Yes to God in the words, 'Let what you have said be done to me.'

It is in the light of that Yes that Mary as we hear in today's gospel passage, sets out to visit Elizabeth, her cousin, who is expecting the 'unexpected' birth of her son who we will come to know as John the Baptist. Both unborn child and mother rejoice, and Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit, recognises the blessedness of Mary, and of the child in her womb, whom she calls Lord. Elizabeth then gives the real reason for Mary's blessedness, namely her belief that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled. To this Mary responds with the prayer we have come to know and love as the Magnificat which has echoes of Hannah and other women in the Old Testament.

Mary glorifies God for doing great things for her and one of those great things is to put Mary on the side of the poor and of the little ones. Let's hear her words again, 'He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away.' Mary is the Mother of all who are oppressed, overlooked or scorned. Mary reminds us that God is on the their side, and is opposed to leaders who brutalise their people by denying their human rights, keeping them in poverty or ruling with violence. Praying the Magnificat has consequences for ourselves, moving us to action. To pray the Magnificat is to accept that we have certain responsibilities, among them: working for justice and peace, opposing dictatorships wherever they exist in our world; encouraging world leaders to bring about a fairer distribution of the world's resources, doing what we can to combat climate change and helping to bring about a transformation in the lives of people here and now.

Celebrating the Assumption, not proclaimed as a dogma until 1950, but kept alive in the hearts of God's people for centuries, is an act of hope expressed by St Paul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading – 'Just as all people die in Adam, so all will be brought to life in Christ, but all of them in the proper order; Christ as the first fruits, and then after the coming of Christ, those who belong to him' – The Assumption tells us that Mary shares eternal life with her Son, something we all hope to do in the future, when heaven and earth will meet for each of us at a time and place none of us know.

## Bidding Prayers for the Assumption of Mary

Celebrant:

The Lord fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty. Trusting in his promise of mercy, we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

We pray for the Church - that under the care of Mary, and supported by her prayers, the Church may always be a sign of humility to the whole world.

Lord in your mercy

We pray for the people of Afghanistan – that as the Taliban advance increases, the International Community will support the legitimate government, so that the people may know stability, justice and peace.

Lord in your mercy

We pray for women throughout the world – that they will always be given the honour and respect they deserve and never be subject to violence or abuse.

Lord in your mercy

We pray for those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit – that they and their families will receive the love and support they so need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

We pray for those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic, and Ellen Howarth, Mona Fallows, and James Norbury whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary whose Assumption in heaven we celebrate today, as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Good and gracious God, you sent your Son to be born of a woman and so enter our human condition as a sign of your love. Grant that we may imitate Mary's humble service in all that we do and be bearers of your love to the world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen