



# The Holy See

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 9 July 1997*

## ***Mary is first creature to enjoy eternal life***

1. The Church's constant and unanimous Tradition shows how Mary's Assumption is part of the divine plan and is rooted in her unique sharing in the mission of her Son. In the first millennium sacred authors had already spoken in this way.

Testimonies, not yet fully developed, can be found in St Ambrose, St Epiphanius and Timothy of Jerusalem. St Germanus I of Constantinople (†730) puts these words on Jesus' lips as he prepares to take his Mother to heaven: "You must be where I am, Mother inseparable from your Son..." (*Hom. 3 in Dormitionem*, PG 98, 360).

In addition, the same ecclesial Tradition sees the fundamental reason for the Assumption in the divine motherhood.

We find an interesting trace of this conviction in a fifth-century apocryphal account attributed to Pseudo-Melito. The author imagines Christ questioning Peter and the Apostles on the destiny Mary deserved, and this is the reply he received: "Lord, you chose this handmaid of yours to become an immaculate dwelling place for you.... Thus it seemed right to us, your servants, that just as you reign in glory after conquering death, so you should raise your Mother's body and take her rejoicing with you to heaven" (*Transitus Mariae*, 16, PG 5, 1238). It can therefore be said that the divine motherhood, which made Mary's body the immaculate dwelling place of the Lord, was the basis of her glorious destiny.

2. St Germanus maintains in a richly poetic text that it is Jesus' affection for his Mother which

requires Mary to be united with her divine Son in heaven: “Just as a child seeks and desires its mother’s presence and a mother delights in her child’s company, it was fitting that you, whose motherly love for your Son and God leaves no room for doubt, should return to him. And was it not right, in any case, that this God who had a truly filial love for you, should take you into his company?” (*Hom. 1 in Dormitionem*, PG 98, 347). In another text, the venerable author combines the private aspect of the relationship between Christ and Mary with the saving dimension of her motherhood, maintaining that “the mother of Life should share the dwelling place of Life” (*ibid.*, PG 98, 348).

3. According to some of the Church Fathers, another argument for the privilege of the Assumption is taken from Mary’s sharing in the work of Redemption. St John Damascene underscores the relationship between her participation in the Passion and her glorious destiny: “It was right that she who had seen her Son on the Cross and received the sword of sorrow in the depths of her heart ... should behold this Son seated at the right hand of the Father” (*Hom. 2*, PG 96, 741). In the light of the paschal mystery, it appears particularly clear that the Mother should also be glorified with her Son after death.

The Second Vatican Council, recalling the mystery of the Assumption in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, draws attention to the privilege of the Immaculate Conception: precisely because she was “preserved free from all stain of original sin” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 59), Mary could not remain like other human beings in the state of death until the end of the world. The absence of original sin and her perfect holiness from the very first moment of her existence required the full glorification of the body and soul of the Mother of God.

4. Looking at the mystery of the Blessed Virgin’s Assumption, we can understand the plan of divine Providence plan for humanity: after Christ, the Incarnate Word, Mary is the first human being to achieve the eschatological ideal, anticipating the fullness of happiness promised to the elect through the resurrection of the body.

In the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin we can also see the divine will to advance woman.

In a way analogous to what happened at the beginning of the human race and of salvation history, in God’s plan the eschatological ideal was not to be revealed in an individual, but in a couple. Thus in heavenly glory, beside the risen Christ there is a woman who has been raised up, Mary: the new Adam and the new Eve, the first-fruits of the general resurrection of the bodies of all humanity.

The eschatological conditions of Christ and Mary should not, of course, be put on the same level. Mary, the new Eve, received from Christ, the new Adam, the fullness of grace and heavenly glory, having been raised through the Holy Spirit by the sovereign power of the Son.

5. Despite their brevity, these notes enable us to show clearly that Mary's Assumption reveals the nobility and dignity of the human body.

In the face of the profanation and debasement to which modern society frequently subjects the female body, the mystery of the Assumption proclaims the supernatural destiny and dignity of every human body, called by the Lord to become an instrument of holiness and to share in his glory.

Mary entered into glory because she welcomed the Son of God in her virginal womb and in her heart. By looking at her, the Christian learns to discover the value of his own body and to guard it as a temple of God, in expectation of the resurrection.

The Assumption, a privilege granted to the Mother of God, thus has immense value for the life and destiny of humanity.

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*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Pope said:*

I extend a cordial welcome to the Venerable Dada Vaswani and the group of Hindu visitors from Bombay, India. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially the groups from England, Scotland, Ireland, Indonesia, Canada and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

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