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Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Parishioner Reflection

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Over the years many people, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, have asked: “why do Catholics worship Mary?” The first thing that I respond is: “We don’t worship Mary. Catholics, like all Christians, worship God alone.” People often confuse gestures of devotion and honour for our Blessed Mother as something more because they have seen processions with statues of Mary and the affection expressed by the participants may appear inappropriate to themselves and they feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the Church has always encouraged the veneration of Mary and images of her in icons, paintings, and statues. But why do we venerate Mary at all? This tradition is ancient and goes back to the early Church.

The early church viewed Mary as the new Eve, the ark of the new Covenant, the Theotokos and the Mother of Christ. In the Litany to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Church proclaims all the various names that she is known by. They are a testament to the enduring role that Mary, the Mother of our Lord, has played in the Church for the last two millennia. These names refer to her roles, mission and importance over time and in the last century and a half the Church has acknowledged certain teachings and understandings of Mary as Dogma. The Immaculate conception was proclaimed and promulgated as dogma of the Church in “Ineffabilis Deus” by Pope Pius IX in 1854. This means that Mary was conceived without original sin (more about this later). The second dogma followed almost 100 years later, the Assumption of Mary, when Pope Pius XII proclaimed it infallibly in 1950. “Munificentissimus Deus” asserted that “that the immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever virgin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven.” Mary is the first fruit of what all the saved will experience when we finally reach the bliss of heaven. However, the answer why has not yet been elucidated.

Mary is due all this attention and veneration because God has deigned it to be so. She was preserved from all stain of original sin and remained sinless her whole life because of God’s work in her and her cooperation with all the grace given to her. On the one hand she was given many graces because she was to be the Mother of God and as such, she had to be a completely worthy ark of the Covenant. The ark of the Old Testament carried with it the very presence and holiness of God. It could not be touched because doing so would defile it and it also meant death. Indeed, when King David decided to finally move the ark to Jerusalem where he could worship it, one of the

Levites touched it by accident and died instantly. The Greek name for Mary is Theotokos, which means "God bearer." Like the ark of old, Mary too carried our Lord in her womb, for many years in her arms and throughout the rest of her life in her heart. However, as a fully and completely human person she also cooperated with God's will for her. Recall her own response to Gabriel's proclamation at the Feast of the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) In today's Gospel, we hear her Magnificat which is recited daily during the evening prayer of the Divine Office. Notice the key words: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour." In her great humility, she begins by asserting how she magnifies the Lord and throughout the Magnificat she continually praises God and the tremendous love He has shown His people by sending forth a saviour to the world through a simple woman from a despised village in northern Israel.

So to sum up, we venerate Mary because God has done great things through her and she had to be a worthy ark to carry the Son of the Most High. She was given tremendous graces but she also always cooperated with God's grace and that makes her a very special person indeed. We have had many great saints over the last two thousand years but none have ever been claimed to be sinless.... None but Mary. She is therefore the Queen of saints. During these times of COVID and fear, it is of tremendous comfort to know that we have a loving Mother interceding for us and awaiting us in heaven. Mary, our Mother, pray for us!