



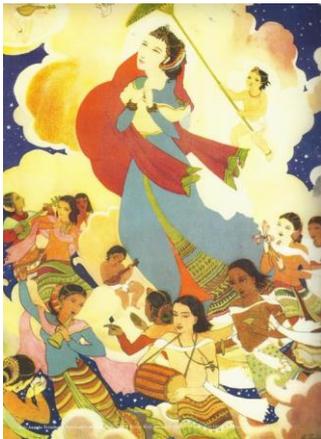
The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
“Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5)



Very dear Sisters and Friends,

I wish you all a grace-filled feast of Mary's Assumption! I hope this message finds you all in good health and I pray for the same.

As some sisters asked me, I am happy to share some reflections on Mary's Assumption from a biblical perspective. A search for biblical references to Mary's Assumption is bound to be a failure as the Assumption of Mary does not figure in the New Testament. However, the Gospel traditions underline the intimate relationship between Jesus and Mary as well as the unique role played by Jesus's mother in Salvation History. This close association is foundational to the belief in the Assumption of Mary. But we must make a distinction between Jesus's resurrection and ascension, and Mary's being assumed or taken into heaven by the Risen Christ. It is also important to keep in mind that people like Moses, Enoch and Elijah had been taken up into heaven by God, so the idea was not alien to the traditions of first century Judaism. These traditions also lie behind the transfiguration narratives in the Gospels. There Moses and Elijah, in their glorified bodies, are found with the glorified Jesus. Similarly, we have a portrait of a glorified woman in the book of Revelation (Chapter 12), an image of the blessed condition of humankind before sin entered our history. Mary, the mother of Jesus, embodies that condition.



For our reflection today, I would like to focus on the narratives dealing with the mother of Jesus in John's Gospel and what Mary might say to us in these trying times. In fact, two references to Mary frame the Gospel. The mother of Jesus initiates the ministry of Jesus at Cana in Chapter 2, and with the Beloved Disciple she is at the foot of the cross just before Jesus's death in Chapter 19. At Cana, Jesus obeys his mother while at the cross the mother obeys her son. The Johannine Jesus addresses Mary as "woman" on both occasions. This expression alludes to the biblical image of Mary as the second "Eve". An appreciation of John's Gospel as a whole is important for the doctrine of the Assumption. However, we shall just dwell on Chapters 2 and 19.

The Johannine Jesus begins his ministry at Cana by changing water into wine. We encounter Jesus in the company of a poor family who could not afford enough wine for their guests at a wedding celebration (2:1-11). This simple family represents all those who are on the margins, who are deprived and are constrained to live in want. Mary expressed her concern to Jesus – "they have no wine". We can hear similar voices today: they have no food, no job, no friends, no peace, no hope, no prospects for the future. The mother of Jesus calls her son's attention to the desperate condition in which the poor find themselves: "Can you not do something to change this situation?" For Jesus, this is an important moment of discerning God's will. I would paraphrase the response of Jesus as follows: "Has not your concern to do with my mission? Has not my hour come now?" The Johannine Jesus was aware that his mission implied great risk and danger to the

point of his humiliating death. Jesus knew that his mission would lead him to his 'hour' – his suffering and death on the cross. Mary's appeal to the attendants – "Do whatever he tells you" (2:5) – reveals both her conviction that Jesus' mission is to act on behalf of those on the margins as well as her complete trust in Jesus' power to transform such situations. It is Mary who first discerns the time when Jesus has to begin his messianic ministry. Jesus listens to his mother and responds to the humiliation of the family. Jesus changes water into wine and replaces the scarcity of wine with an abundance. In other words, Jesus replaced the situation of embarrassment with one of an abundance of joy. The story is concluded with the statement that Jesus "revealed his glory and the disciples believed in him" (2:11). God's glory is the manifestation of God's love in concrete service as a response to the specific needs of people. The mother of Jesus invites us to continue the mission of Jesus today at the service of life.

In John 19, Mary stands at the foot of the cross and suffers with her Son (verses 25-28). She accepts that the death of Jesus is imperative for Salvation History and the destiny of Jesus. The monologue of Jesus from the cross – addressing Mary, "Woman, here is your son" and addressing the Beloved Disciple, "Here is your mother" – reveals a significant change taking place in the life of the mother of Jesus. She is offered a new life as she is invited to be the mother of the disciples of Jesus. In Chapter 2, Mary invites Jesus to begin his mission by revealing God's glory and thus inaugurating the messianic era; whereas in Chapter 19, Jesus requests Mary to welcome a new way of being mother and thus inaugurating the new Covenant community or the family of God. Mary's discipleship consists of participating in the mission and suffering of Jesus. That includes welcoming the newness of life as it unfolds with its new challenges. And it is the same for all who aspire today to be beloved disciples of Jesus.

How, then, do we best celebrate the feast of the Assumption during today's corona pandemic? The mother of Jesus invites us to listen to new calls and discern the will of God in these challenging times (John 2). Let us meditate on the invitation of the mother of Jesus – "Do whatever he tells you". How do we become agents of social transformation listening to the cry of the poor during this pandemic? May we become mediators of change in situations of embarrassment, insecurity, uncertainty and fear brought about by today's pandemic.

The Johannine Jesus challenges us to embrace and welcome the newness that is unfolding in manifold ways in our day to day lives (John 19). The last words of Jesus: "Here is your mother" is an invitation to reclaim our new identity as the brothers and sisters of Jesus. It is a call to build up a "family of God" in the suffering world gripped by the pandemic we all face. We are called to make a radical shift from our divisive and discriminatory attitudes to universal love, to social justice and to the integral development of societies. Let us remain open to what the Spirit is trying to awaken in us and to where the Spirit is leading us. May the celebration this year be a catalyst to discover our "new forms of presence" as Religious of the Assumption!

With all my affection and prayers,



Sister Rekha, Superior General

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