

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

### The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Year B

15 August 2021



#### Collect

Almighty ever-living God,  
who assumed the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of your Son,  
body and soul into heavenly glory,  
grant, we pray,  
that, always attentive to the things that are above,  
we may merit to be sharers of her glory.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

#### Readings and Commentaries

Belief in the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was decreed only in 1950 but was evident in the prayer tradition of the Church long before that. Liturgical texts appeared as early as the fifth century. The present Preface for the feast links Mary's unique destiny with her role as the Mother of God; it also sees her Assumption as sign and promise for the pilgrim people of God.

She was personally spared

. . . the corruption of the tomb,  
since from her own body she marvellously brought forth  
your incarnate Son, the Author of all life.

But her privilege is a blessing for us all, since Mary  
was assumed into heaven

as the beginning and image of your Church's coming to perfection  
and a sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people.

## A reading from the book of the Apocalypse

11:19; 12:1–6, 10

The sanctuary of God in heaven opened, and the ark of the covenant could be seen inside it. Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman, adorned with the sun, standing on the moon, and with the twelve stars on her head for a crown. She was pregnant, and in labour, crying aloud in the pangs of childbirth. Then a second sign appeared in the sky, a huge red dragon which had seven heads and ten horns, and each of the seven heads crowned with a coronet. Its tail dragged a third of the stars from the sky and dropped them to the earth, and the dragon stopped in front of the woman as she was having the child, so that he could eat it as soon as it was born from its mother. The woman brought a male child into the world, the son who was to rule all the nations with an iron sceptre, and the child was taken straight up to God and to his throne, while the woman escaped into the desert, where God had made a place of safety ready. Then I heard a voice shout from heaven, 'Victory and power and empire for ever have been won by our God, and all authority for his Christ.'

## First Reading

The alternative name for the book of the Apocalypse – the book of Revelation – gives a clue to its meaning and purpose. Writings in this genre aim to give encouragement to a persecuted minority, threatened by the might of hostile powers. They claim to reveal secret truths to those who know how to interpret their visions and symbols. Cosmic upheavals, fantastic creatures and fierce battles are commonly featured. Ultimately the conflict is between good and evil, or between God and Satan, or heaven and earth. The forces of good prevail.

Of their nature apocalyptic writings call for imaginative engagement, and are thus open to all kinds of interpretation. Generally it seems best to focus on their ultimate purpose rather than on the precise meaning of particular elements. They aim to encourage struggling communities to believe in final victory.

Today's reading depicts a confrontation between a pregnant woman (portrayed in a cosmic setting of sun, moon and stars) and "a huge red dragon which had seven heads and ten horns". The story has connections with episodes in the Old Testament such as the birth of Moses; Jewish traditions would see the woman as the mother of the Messiah. Christian tradition has identified the woman as either Mary or the Church, and the child as Jesus Christ.

Readers have the task of enabling the congregation to imagine this cosmic conflict. A powerful struggle is under way, and the tension builds towards the final verses. Only at the end do we learn that the woman and the child find places of safety and that heaven has prevailed. The story needs to be proclaimed with a heightened sense of drama, sustained throughout.

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 44:10–12, 16

R. The queen stands at your right hand,  
arrayed in gold.

The daughters of kings are among your loved ones.  
On your right stands the queen in gold of Ophir.  
Listen, O daughter, give ear to my words:  
forget your own people and your father's house. R.

So will the king desire your beauty:  
He is your lord, pay homage to him.  
They are escorted amid gladness and joy;  
they pass within the palace of the king. R.

## Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 44/45 seems to be a poem written in honour of the king on the occasion of his wedding. Most of the psalm is dedicated to the king, but there is a section addressed to the king's bride. The first verse of the responsorial psalm marks this transition.

Readers and congregation may find the response – "The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold" – somewhat obscure. It is a text directed to the royal bridegroom, taken from the first of the two selected verses. It invites us to imagine the bride's glittering retinue and the splendour of the whole scene.

Written originally to celebrate a royal marriage, the psalm has prompted Christian imaginations to reinterpret it in terms of the marriage between Christ and the Church. Readers should proclaim the text in a joyful spirit.

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul  
to the Corinthians**

**15:20–26**

Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep. Death came through one man and in the same way the resurrection of the dead has come through one man. Just as all men die in Adam, so all men will be brought to life in Christ; but all of them in their proper order: Christ as the first-fruits and then, after the coming of Christ, those who belong to him. After that will come the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, having done away with every sovereignty, authority and power. For he must be king until he has put all his enemies under his feet and the last of the enemies to be destroyed is death, for everything is to be put under his feet.

**A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Luke**

**1:39–56**

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? From the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

And Mary said:

'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord  
and my spirit exults in God my saviour;  
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.  
Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me  
blessed,  
for the Almighty has done great things for me.  
Holy is his name,  
and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who  
fear him.

He has shown the power of his arm,  
he has routed the proud of heart.  
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.  
He has come to the help of Israel his servant,  
mindful of his mercy

– according to the promise he made to our ancestors –  
of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for  
ever.'

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

**Second Reading**

As for the Vigil Mass, so for the Mass of the day, the second reading comes from chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. Paul spends the whole chapter expounding on the resurrection. He does so in full flight. The thoughts seem to tumble out one after the other as Paul's rabbinical imagination gives birth to them. The result is a theological tapestry woven from many strands.

Part of the background to today's text is the story of the first man and woman as it is told in the first chapters of Genesis. Paul attributes death to the so-called "fall" of Adam, but life comes with Christ. Another element from Jewish tradition is Paul's reference to "first-fruits". It was the practice in ancient Israel (attested in various texts of the Pentateuch) to dedicate the first part of the land's produce to God. This was a way of remembering and acknowledging that the land and its blessings were in the first place God's gifts to Israel.

Paul envisages a process in which death ("the last of the enemies") is gradually overcome – first by Christ and then eventually for all human beings – until the victorious Christ hands everything over to the Father. The use of this text for the feast of the Assumption invites us to see Mary privileged with complete participation in this triumph.

Readers would be well advised to read through and rehearse this text several times. It needs to be proclaimed rather slowly to enable the congregation to follow the line of Paul's thought. For an inclusive language rendition of the text, go to the NRSV.

**Gospel**

The gospel reading includes both the narrative of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth and her song of praise, the Magnificat. The account of the visitation has both human appeal and theological intent.

We can readily identify with the shared joy of the two unexpectedly pregnant women, one young and unmarried, the other "getting on in years" and barren. Luke's story of their affectionate meeting has fired many a Christian imagination. But his purpose is far more profound than gaining our human interest. The whole scene is permeated by the Holy Spirit; both women are blessed and inspired. But there is a difference. It is Mary's child who is the Lord, and even in the womb the Baptist bears witness to this.

Mary's jubilant song of praise is a mosaic of utterances from the Old Testament. It especially relates to the song of Hannah at her son Samuel's birth (1 Samuel 2:1–10). Luke thus presents Mary as bringing to fulfilment the long succession of Israel's "poor in spirit". She gathers their prayers together in one great hymn of blessing.

This is a very familiar text. The challenge for the reader is to proclaim it with freshness. It invites the congregation to celebrate this feast with Mary's own joy and thankfulness.

## Concluding Prayer

### Solemn Blessing (The Blessed Virgin Mary)

May God, who through the childbearing of the Blessed Virgin Mary willed in his great kindness to redeem the human race, be pleased to enrich us with his blessing.  
Amen.

May we know always and everywhere the protection of her, through whom we have been found worthy to receive the author of life.  
Amen.

May we, who have devoutly gathered on this day, carry away with us the gifts of spiritual joys and heavenly rewards.  
Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, come down on us and remain with us for ever.  
**Amen.**

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for The Blessed Virgin Mary, Roman Missal p. 717)