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The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
At the Vigil Mass

The first reading this evening recounts for us the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into the capital city of Jerusalem, recently established by King David. He brought the Ark of the Covenant to the holy mountain, "for the LORD has chosen Zion; he prefers her for his dwelling" (Psalm 132:13). What is this Ark?

It is not the Ark of Noah, but the Ark of Moses. Whereas Noah's Ark carried those creatures destined to survive the great Flood, the Ark of Moses, the Ark of God, bore not creatures, but the Creator himself.

The Lord commanded Moses to build this Ark and to place within it the two tablets of the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 25:10-16). The Lord promised Moses that he would be present in the Ark, saying,

There I will meet you and there, from above the propitiatory [the cover], between the two cherubim on the ark of the commandments, I will tell you all the commands that I wish you to give to the Israelites (Exodus 25:22).

It was in the Ark that the Lord would be present to his people and from the Ark that he would speak to and lead his people.

The Ark of the Covenant was then placed inside the meeting tent, curtained off from the people. When Moses had arranged the meeting tent just as the Lord told him, "the cloud covered

the meeting tent, and the glory of the LORD filled the Dwelling" (Exodus 40:34).

This is the same tent that David erected in Jerusalem, of which we have heard just a moment ago. It is this tent that was replaced by the Temple, built by David's son, Solomon. But what has any of this to do with the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven, which we celebrate today?

It has everything to do with today's celebration. The ancient Fathers of the Church

looked upon the Ark of the Covenant, built of incorruptible wood and placed in the Lord's temple, as a type of the most pure body of the Virgin Mary, preserved and exempt from all the corruption of the tomb and raised up to such glory in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

The Ark of the Covenant, which housed the glory of God, the presence of God, was seen as a prefiguration of the true Ark of the Covenant, the Virgin Mary, who housed the Lord himself, Jesus the Christ, in her womb.

In Mary's assumption into heaven the words of the Psalmist are fulfilled: "Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your holiness" (Psalm 132:8). The Lord Jesus has taken his ark, his Blessed Mother, into heaven, into the place of his rest.

We know that through the sin of Adam and Eve death entered the world. We, too, suffer the consequences of this original

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 26.

sin and we know that we, too, will die. We also know that after death our bodies are corrupted, they decay and turn to dust and ashes. But this is not the case with the body of the Mother of God.

Because of her singular fidelity to the divine plan, Mary has been granted two unique privileges: her Immaculate Conception and her Assumption. Mary,

by an entirely unique privilege, completely overcame sin by her Immaculate Conception, and as a result she was not subject to the law or remaining in the corruption of the grave, and she did not have to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body.<sup>2</sup>

In Mary, the words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (Isaiah 25:8; I Corinthians 15:54).

But why should the Lord grant this favor to his Blessed Mother? He has granted it to her, I think, for two reasons: because it is eminently fitting, and because it gives us hope.

That woman in the crowd spoke well of the Mother of Jesus. "Blessed is the womb that carried you," she exclaimed, "and the breasts at which you nursed" (Luke 11:27). Yes, it as is Pope Pius XII said:

[I]t seems impossible to think of her, the one who conceived Christ, brought him forth, nursed him with her milk, held him in her arms, and clasped him to her breast, as being apart from him in body, even though not in soul, after this earthly life. Since our Redeemer is the Son of Mary, he could not do otherwise, as the perfect observer of God's law, than to honor, not only his eternal Father, but

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 5.

also his most beloved Mother. And, since it was within his power to grant her this great honor, to preserve her from the corruption of the tomb, we must believe that he really acted in this way.<sup>3</sup>

How could the Son not glorify his Mother, and in this way bring glory to himself?

But there is more, for if we look at the Assumption of our Blessed Mother we see the promise of our own resurrection on the last day.

We know that Mary remains fully human, even in her Assumption into heaven and this gives us hope. For if Mary, a human, has entered body and soul into the heavenly realm, we who are also human can enter into heaven with her. There is a place for us, too!

Let us rejoice in this holy day and let each of us look to Mary, our Mother in heaven. Let us ask her to show us the way to blessedness, to happiness. Let us take confidence in her Assumption and ask her Son to keep us faithful that we, with Mary, may "enter his dwelling" and "worship at his footstool" (Psalm 132:7).

Today, let each of us "shout merrily for joy" (Psalm 132:9), for "that which is mortal [has clothed] itself with immortality" (I Corinthians 15:54). Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 38.