



The Truth of Mary's Body and Soul Being Taken into Heaven

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Jesus told Pilate: I was born into this world to tell the truth.

And everyone who belongs to the truth listens to me.

Pilate asked Jesus, "What is the truth?" (John 18:37-38)

What Pilate asked of Jesus 2000 years ago is similar to what we are asking ourselves today? In an uncertain world how can we be certain about anything? Is the pandemic virus that killed hundreds of thousands and infected millions an elaborate hoax? Is there a secret plan to undermine American democracy by inundating the news media with false news? The bigger question is: how do we establish the truth, and on whose authority? Truth in today's Alice in Wonderland world is whatever you want it to be. We live in a secular world where discerning what is true is almost impossible.

This can't be said of the Catholic Church. What we now believe and profess in our articles of faith is without question true? But this was not always the case as we can see in the first centuries after the death of Christ. When Christ didn't return as soon as expected the early Christians tried to make sense of his crucifixion, his resurrection and the meaning behind what he was preaching. Differing opinions gave rise to different beliefs. Three in particular threatened the very survival of the early Church because they were strongly at variance with the established beliefs of the apostles and of the early church Fathers.

The Manicheans believed in two ultimate sources of creation, the one good, the other evil. They believed physical matter comes from the evil one. The Donatists believed the validity of the sacraments depended on the moral character of the person administering the sacrament. The Pelagians believed that man can merit eternal life by his natural power without the aid of God's grace.

St. Paul's provides some insight as to how he dealt with the state of affairs in the church he established in Philippi. Paul thanks the Philippian Christians for the gift they sent to him in his time of need and supporting his mission to defend the gospel and establish it firmly. The letter is marked by its emphasis of the joy, confidence, unity, and Paul's hope that they would persevere in their Christian faith and life. He writes of the joy and peace that God gives to those who live in union with Christ. But he also wants to warn them against enemies and dangers, specifically the opposition of other Christian workers towards him. Paul tells them that

when it comes to preaching Christ, some do it because they are jealous and quarrelsome. They don't proclaim Christ truthfully. They proclaim it from a spirit of selfish ambition. Paul says that they think it will make more trouble for him while he is in prison (Phil 1:7-19). He then goes to the heart of the problem. He is distressed by the false teaching that was becoming evident in the church at Philippi. As an antidote he stresses upon them that the "important thing is that your way of life should be as the gospel of Christ requires so that, whether or not I am able to see you, I will hear that you are standing firm with one common purpose and that with only one desire you are fighting together for the faith of the gospel Now you can take part with me in battle. It is the same battle you saw me fighting in the past and the one I am fighting still." (Phil 1:27-30). Paul's message is clear: proclaim Christ truthfully and safeguard the church from false teachers. To all the churches he established Paul gave the same message: "All the truth of God comes down to us through Jesus, the Son of God. And when I, Paul, brought you God's message, you heard it and accepted it; not as a message from human beings but as God's message, which indeed it is." (1st Thes 2: 13).

If you spend some time reflecting on Paul's epistle to the Philippians you will discover his strategy for assuring the truthfulness of what we believe as Catholics. It's found in the Deacons prayer on page 45. "May the Lord God remember in His Kingdom all you orthodox Christians, always, now and forever?" Truth is well-preserved in Orthodoxy, (right belief). Orthodoxy is the authorized doctrine or practices given to the Church by Christ and protected from err by the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Truth.

We recently celebrated the feast of the 6th Council Fathers. The seven ecumenical Councils, from the 4th to the 9th centuries, were convened to discuss and settle matters of Church doctrine and practice for the Universal Catholic Church. One such matter was in regards to the Assumption of the Mother of God into Heaven. Some Church historians consider it to be one of the oldest of Marian feasts and believe that it was first celebrated in the Syrian church in the 5th century. In the Eastern Church, the day of the death of the Most Holy Mother of God is called the Dormition (or falling asleep). The word sunoyo in Syrian means transference, meaning that when Mary died her body did not know corruption and together with her soul was taken up into heaven; hence in 690 the Western Church's name for the feast is "the Assumption". Accepted in Rome under Pope Sergius (687-701) the feast passed over to the other countries of Europe.

Prior to the fourth century no mention is made in the writings of the holy Fathers of the Dormition of the Mother of God. It was not until after the 4th century that, on the basis of tradition, church writers began to write about the final moments of Mary. These include St. Gregory of Tours (died 594) in the West, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Modest (died 634), who was the first to have a sermon on the Dormition. Toward the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th century they directed their attention to her assumption into heaven – body and soul.

In the Western Church, beginning with the first Vatican Council (1869-1870), there has always been an attempt to establish as a dogma the belief of the Church in the miraculous Dormition and Assumption of the

Mother of God. In 1950 Pius XII took this task upon himself. After obtaining the opinions of all the bishops of the Catholic Church he defined as a truth revealed by God that the Mother of God “having ended the course of her life on earth was taken body and soul into heavenly glory”. The basis for her assumption is found not in Scriptures but in sacred tradition of the Church. In this case, Church doctrine growing out of 1,900 years of revealed truth as lived out in the tradition of the faithful Church members.

On August 15th we honor Mary for the special recognition that she received from God - the glorification of her body. By her Assumption she has gained a special victory over death. In Mary, human nature reached its goal. And from heaven she reaches out to us asking us to join her through the saving grace and power of Jesus Christ our Savior. By her Dormition we have a powerful intercessor and protectress in heaven. We know this is true because of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints, wherein those in Heaven pray for us and intercede before God on our behalf. In remembrance of this very special Marian feast let us say today, and every day: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and forever and ever.