

## The Assumption

We often say that the Catholic Church has something very specific and precious to offer the world in its devotion to Mary.

### Having Said That

I am reminded of a principle that has become clearer to me with every passing year: that genuine honour has a lot of deformed and malevolent impersonators, whose influence is far from healthy. *Honour your father and your mother* is the life-giving commandment that stands at the head of the seven devoted to human affairs. But that has not prevented it from furnishing an unconscious justification for all kinds of abusive relationships, which have embittered people so radically as to have wrecked the family's life to the third and fourth generation. Obedience, in its proper place, is a good thing, and you can't, we're told, have too much of a good thing. Well, I beg to differ, and there is precious little *honour* in the kind of obedience which stifles and steamrollers the life of the next generation. We are forbidden (so far) by law from attempting to clone ourselves in laboratories. But the attempt to do it in families has been with us through history, and it is immune from prosecution.

### The Mother of God

It doesn't take a lot of insight to recognise that our Lady has become a focus for all kinds of false devotion. In her rôle as the mother of Jesus she excels all the rest of us who are trying to give him a place in our lives and in the world. She, by her vocation, was enabled to do that *perfectly*; and in this she differs from you and me in kind. What I give to the world is sometimes a little like Jesus, but what she gave to the world was Jesus himself. Still, like all mothers or fathers, she looked on with amazement (and sometimes with horror) at what her Son was doing. She appears in Luke's Gospel, saying to him: *My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you!* It could have been repeated, surely, all the way to Calvary, and never more truly than beneath the Cross. This is real, powerful theology, telling real truths about the coming of God and the way of the Cross. It is alive with the realism of the Incarnation, and anyone who loses touch with it is losing the Gospel. No-one who excludes Mary can understand Jesus' life properly. And so much that can be said of Mary can be said of us too - Jesus himself said of his disciples that they were *his mother and sisters and brothers*. The child who transfigured Mary's life and being does something similar for all believing humanity.

### In God's Hands

Mary said, *I am the handmaid of the Lord*. Her life was delivered into God's power, much as Jesus' life is at the Cross. The feast of the Assumption is a day for us to deliver our lives into God's plan and destiny. He is the great interpreter of our life; all its mysteries, questions, enigmas will be resolved in God and only in God. No psychiatrist, personal trainer, fashion guru, philosopher, or spiritual director can do this. If you want to know who you are, and where you're going, you must ask God. The proper honour for Mary is the found in the same way. Assumption - coronation - eternal salvation: however you put it, it is the final reality *designed and built by God, and not by us*: it is as central and divine a deed as Creation itself, and as far from our human reach.

### Let God Be Our God

What we are and what we are to be - both realities are in the mind of God. This feast day takes Mary up from the world of human reckoning, and into the blessed realm of God's judgment. We rejoice to see her leaving behind the assessment of the dreary theologians, the crackpot visionaries, the manufacturers of plaster statues, all religious bigots, and the mighty of the earth, who, in her exaltation, are simultaneously dethroned. With her we ourselves accede to the fulfilment of all God's promises, as a created person is welcomed to the unveiled knowledge of the Father. She, who in our earthly condition found it natural to love the Son of God with her whole heart, enters with perfect openness into the Father's house. This perhaps is the most moving quality of Mary: that she develops, alongside the awesome destiny of the Motherhood of the Messiah, a beauty of trust which belongs to the kingdom of heaven. Zechariah questioned, and became afraid, and was struck dumb, powerless to bless. Mary heard the words of greeting, was disturbed, but peacefully opened her heart to the coming of the Gospel, the entrance of the child. May our earthly love - for God, and for others - open our hearts as wide as hers, and make us as peaceful as Mary, as ready as she was for sharing the joy of God.  
*Fr Philip*