

+

Assumption  
August 15, 2018

I was one of the few Catholic kids in school growing up, and so from time to time, my friends would ask me some of those “Catholic-questions”, and their go-to was always some variation of “why do you guys worship Mary?” Now of course, we don’t worship Mary, and I’d tell them as much. But I never really knew what to say after that, I couldn’t really explain why we Catholics love Mary so much. And so truth be told, for a time, I found Mary to be a little embarrassing.

Which I suppose just proves that Mary really is my mother, because as I did for my mom, I went through a phase where she embarrassed me. But fortunately, as my faith grew and my love for Jesus and His Church grew, so did my love for Mary—and I gradually grew out of the “embarrassed by mom” phase of my spiritual life. Which is good, because as our liturgy makes so clear today, we have no reason to be embarrassed by our love for Mary.

For today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption, the historical reality that sometime after His own Ascension into heaven, Jesus took His Mother Mary to heaven as well—took her body and soul, before her body met the corruption of death. And not coincidentally, our readings today are overflowing with reasons to love Mary. We see in our first reading that the devil—the great dragon in the sky—hates the woman who gave birth to the newborn king. The devil hates Mary...and that alone’s an excellent reason for us to love her. We hear in our second reading that Jesus has saved us from sin and death by becoming man—and we know that He became man through His mother, through Mary. Another reason for us to love her, because in accord with God’s plan, Mary’s the one who brought us Jesus. And then there’s our Gospel, where Mary exclaims in praise: “my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,” revealing her

deep love for Him. Yet another reason for us to love her, in her love for the Lord she always seeks to help us love Him more.

But as great as all those reasons are, none of 'em are the main reason we love Mary so much. No, the main reason we love Mary so dearly isn't because the devil hates her, isn't because she brought us Jesus, isn't even because she helps us to love Him. No, the main reason we love Mary is even simpler. We love Mary because we love Jesus...and Jesus really, really loves her.

Jesus, of course, loves everyone infinitely—but He's got a special love for His mama. That's why the Assumption happened, that's why Jesus took Mary, body and soul, to Himself in heaven...because He loves her. And if we love Him, then we'll come to love her too. Because love's truly a sharing of hearts...when we love someone, we start to love what they love, we start to love who they love. That's a reality of love we experience all the time. My brother Kevin's been married for a little over two years now, and as he fell in love with Diana—the woman who's now his wife—he of course got to know her family. And he started to love her family...and he still does—he's blessed with good in-law relations. But even now, he loves them not primarily because they're great people—though they are—nor because they're great cooks—though they're that too. No even now, the main reason he loves them is because he loves his wife, he loves Diana...and she loves them.

You see, it's not uncommon to hear people pit Mary against Jesus, as if loving her more means somehow loving Him less. But that's simply not true, it's literally the opposite. Just as loving her family has brought my brother closer to his wife, not farther away, just as it's helped him love her more, not less, so it is with Mary. Loving her brings us closer to Jesus, loving her helps us love Him *more*, because if we truly love Jesus, if we're truly sharing hearts with Him, then we'll

+

love who He loves. On this Feast of the Assumption, we're reminded that He loves His Mother, He loves Mary, most dearly...and so we are right, we are so right, to love her dearly too.

When I finished writing my homily yesterday evening, I firmly intended to end it right here. But then, prompted by a text message, I checked the news...and I read about the Pennsylvania Grand Jury's Report on priestly sexual abuse. And I was devastated. Although almost all cases of abuse in the report date to before 2002, the evils the report speaks of—the priests who abused and the bishops who covered it up—remain disturbing, devastating, and—quite literally—damning. And so, instead my homily will end here: It's painful for me, it's painful for us all, to see such evil in the Church, such evil among our shepherds. And it's painful for Mary, it's painful for our Blessed Mother, too. And so on this Feast of the Assumption, we turn in our need to her...and ask that through her intercession, her Son may purify His Church.