

Paul F. Ford

ThS 572 The Church in Consummation: Eschatology and Mariology / Fall 2000

Second Written Project: A Marian Meditation

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**The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary:  
Its Meaning for Me, My Students, and My Evangelical Friends**

Unlike the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord or the solemnity of the Epiphany—which have been favorite of mine since I was a monk in the 1970’s—the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been growing on me only since I began to teach mariology at St. John’s Seminary (my first elective in the winter of 1988).

Oh, I had been taken by two fine biblical songs from Fr. Lucien Deiss—“All the Bright Morning Stars Sing Together Her Praises” and “You Are the Honor, You Are the Glory of Your People”—which I used in the suite of music for St. Andrew’s Abbey. And I had begun to sketch the chart of Articles Eight through Twelve of The Apostles’ Creed in which I connected the Assumption to the “future” dimension of what God has-done/is-doing/will-do for us in Jesus Christ. But it was only when I had to teach Chapter Eight of *Lumen Gentium* to seminarians that I came across the distinction between the christotypical and the ecclesiotypical significance of Mary in the crucial October 23, 1963 debate at Vatican Council II between Cardinal König of Vienna and Cardinal Silva of Manila.<sup>1</sup> That distinction became the pair of lenses through which I could re-see all Marian celebrations and devotions.

To do justice to this solemnity as we could experience it liturgically, it is important for me to meditate on the texts of the Vigil Mass as well as those of the Mass during the Day. The Vigil Mass (hereafter referred to as “Vigil”) can take place before or after Evening Prayer I

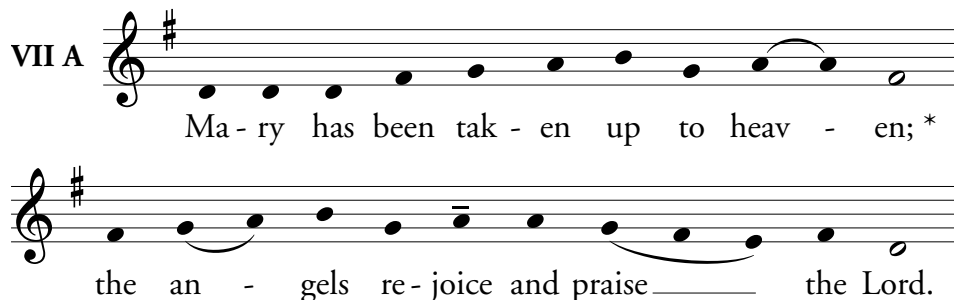
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<sup>1</sup>Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., “The Theological Context of and Introduction to Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*,” *Marian Studies* XXXVII (1986), 50–59.

(the hours are hereafter referred to as “EP I,” “OR,” “MP,” or “EP II”); I am assuming it takes place *after*.

**Evening Prayer I** The first thing I noticed is that all the antiphons of EP I conclude with “alleluia.” I looked to see if this were true of the other hours; but, no, it is unique to EP I. (I will have to research the history of this.) This feature is meant to connect the soteriology of today’s solemnity to the soteriology of the Easter mystery, which includes the mystery of the Ascension. The **second antiphon** of EP I, “Through Eve the gates of heaven were closed to all [hu]mankind; through the Virgin Mother they were opened wide again, alleluia,” speaks to me of a new use for the ancient typology of Eve/Mary: that the supposedly modern christotypical/ecclesiotypical distinction may have its foundation in the First-Adam/Last-Adam soteriology of St. Paul. The **reading** from Romans 8:30, “Those God predestined he likewise called; those he called he also justified; and those he justified he in turn glorified,” might help my sister and brother Evangelicals see the biblical foundation for this feast. I know that my most sensitive friends in the Evangelical world feel that somehow they have neglected the import of “All generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, alleluia,” the **Magnificat antiphon** for EP I. In the **intercessions** (which are also used at EP II) our own Roman Catholic desire to share this mystery with Evangelicals seems to come out in the fourth petition: “Make your Church of one mind and one heart in love, and help all those who believe to be one in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus.” The first and third petitions—“O God . . . , you made the immaculate Virgin Mary share, body and soul, in your Son’s glory in heaven, direct the hearts of your children, to that same glory” and “You made Mary full of grace, grant all [women and] men the joyful abundance of your grace”—imply that the ecclesiotypical dimension of the Immaculate Conception reaches its conclusion in her Assumption. (I just noticed that the **concluding prayer** of EP I is the opening prayer of the Vigil; perhaps both liturgies could be combined into a wonderful Easter-vigil-like choir and assembly celebration after nightfall on August 14th.)

**The Vigil Mass** The closest music to the current sacramentary’s **entrance antiphon**, “All honor to you, Mary! Today you were raised above the choirs of angels to lasting glory with Christ” is found in *By Flowing Waters*,<sup>2</sup> numbers 355–356:



Both *By Flowing Waters* and the antiphonary of the new Sacramentary<sup>3</sup> appoint the victory psalm, Psalm 98, to be sung.<sup>4</sup> The first four verses underscore for me that the Assumption is the Lord’s victory, long promised and remembered, and now revealed in the sight of the nations with the faith to see it:

O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things.  
 His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.  
 The LORD has made known his victory;  
 he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.  
 He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
 to the house of Israel.  
 All the ends of the earth have seen  
 the victory of our God.

*The euchology* The **alternative opening prayer** contains an **invitation** to the prayer of all—assembly and presider—which, if used, would help Evangelicals and Catholics to understand prayer to the saints: “Let us pray *with* Mary to the Father, in whose presence she now dwells” [emphasis added]. The **invocation** of the prayer seems to continue the victory theme of Psalm 98 in its use of the phrase “beauty of your power”: “Almighty Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have revealed the beauty of your power by

<sup>2</sup> Paul F. Ford, *By Flowing Waters: Chant for the Liturgy* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 219.

<sup>3</sup> Photocopy of page 1229 of the approved but yet to be confirmed second edition of the Sacramentary.

<sup>4</sup> The new antiphonary makes Psalm 98 the entrance psalm of both the Vigil and of the Mass during the day (see page 1229).

exalting the lowly virgin of Nazareth and making her the mother of our Savior.” In the **petition** of the prayer the presider gets to say words which remind me of Mary’s continuing, subsidiary rôle in our salvation: “May the prayers of this woman clothed with the sun bring Jesus to the waiting world and fill the void of incompleteness with the presence of her child, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.” The emphasis here is clearly on Jesus.

*The readings* In light of the emphasis I give in class to the parallels between 2 Samuel 6: 1–15 and Luke 1:26–56, I am so happy that the Vigil reads 1 Chronicles 15:3–4, 15-16; 16:1–2—the parallel to 2 Samuel 6: 1–15—and responds to this reading with Verse 8—“Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your holiness”—of Psalm 132, which I believe was composed at the time of this glorious scene:

David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring the ark of the LORD to the place that he had prepared for it. David also called together the sons of Aaron and the Levites. The Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders with poles, as Moses had ordained according to the word of the LORD. David commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kinsmen as chanters, to play on musical instruments, harps, lyres, and cymbals, to make a loud sound of rejoicing. They brought in the ark of God and set it within the tent which David had pitched for it. Then they offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings to God. When David had finished offering up the burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 132:6–7, 9–10, 13–14

R/. (8) Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your holiness.

Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar. Let us enter into his dwelling, let us worship at his footstool.

R/. Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your holiness.

May your priests be clothed with justice; let your faithful ones shout merrily for joy. For the sake of David your servant, reject not the plea of your anointed.

R/. Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your holiness.

For the LORD has chosen Zion; he prefers her for his dwelling. “Zion is my resting place forever, in her will I dwell, for I prefer her.”

R/. Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your holiness.

Verses 13–14 of the psalm also highlight Mary as Daughter Zion, a motif which returns in the intercessions for MP. (This “ark” theme is sounded again during MP and the Mass during the day.) The victory theme returns in **the second reading**, I Corinthians 15:54b–57:

When that which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about: Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But the **gospel acclamation** (Luke 11:28) and the **gospel** (Luke 11:27-28) take us in another direction: “While Jesus was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, ‘Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.’ He replied, ‘Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.’ ” Mary’s obedience is even more important than her motherhood; both mysteries interpenetrate each other and provide the reason why she is the first after Christ to be brought to life.<sup>5</sup>

*The euchology (resumed)*     The **prayer over the gifts** is pretty well translated in this, still the first, edition of the Roman Missal. In the following I add in brackets my translation of the one significant missing nuance: “Lord, receive this sacrifice of praise and peace in honor of the assumption of the Mother of God. May our offering bring us pardon and make our lives a [perpetual act of] thanksgiving to you.<sup>6</sup> We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.” The **preface**—used here and at the day Mass—expresses well the ecclesiological dimension in the line, “to be the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection,” which imitates the alliteration of the original Latin, “*Ecclesiae tuae consummandae initium et imago.*”<sup>7</sup> However the translation lacks several nuances which I supply:

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<sup>5</sup> As in the second reading for the Mass during the Day: “. . . so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order. Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ.”

<sup>6</sup> “[E]t in perpetua gratiarum constituat actione,” *Missale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani II Instauratum Auctoritate Pauli PP. VI Promulgatum (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis MCMLXX)*, 595

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 597.

Today the virgin Mother of God was taken up into heaven  
to be the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection,  
and a sign of [sure] hope and [a passport of] comfort for your people on their  
pilgrim way.  
You would not allow decay to touch her body,  
for she had given birth to your Son, the [Author] Lord of all life,  
in the [inexpressible] glory of the incarnation.  
In our joy we sing to your glory  
with all the choirs of angels: Holy

There is so much lost in the current sacramentary's translation of the **prayer after communion**<sup>8</sup> that I feel led to provide my own: "Having been made partakers even now of the heavenly banquet, we ask your mercy, Lord our God, that we who have celebrated the Assumption of the Mother of God may be freed from all the evils which threaten us through Christ our Lord."

**Office of Readings and Morning Prayer** The **first antiphon** of OR, "Arise, O Virgin Queen, you are for ever worthy of our praise; take your place in the glorious dwelling place of the eternal King," allows us to address Mary in words borrowed, it would appear, from the Songs of Songs and from the wedding Psalm 45. The **versicle and response** echo the gospel of the Vigil: "Blessed are you, Mary, because you believed. The Lord's words to you have been fulfilled." But notice the perfect tense of the last verb: This is a reminder that the Assumption is the fulfillment of the Lord's promises to Mary. The point of the glorious **first reading** from Ephesians 1:16–2:10 is found in the third paragraph:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, *made us alive together with Christ*—by grace you have been saved—and *raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and *this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (NRSV; my emphases)

The privilege-centered, christotypical mariology of Pope Pius XII's apostolic

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<sup>8</sup> "God of mercy, we rejoice because Mary, the mother of our Lord, was taken into the glory of heaven. May the holy food we receive at this table free us from evil. We ask this through Christ our Lord."

constitution—the **second reading**—is offset for me by a new awareness that this dogma was promulgated in All Saints Day 1950. So here is a foretaste of the solidarity-focused ecclesiological mariology of Vatican Council II. The **reading** at MP—or shall we say paraphrase because of the notation “See Isaiah 61:10”—is one of my favorites and comes just before my “life verse” : “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul. For he has clothed me with a robe of salvation, and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, like a bride bedecked with her jewels.” In our Roman Catholic tradition this passage is the Introit for the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, yet another hint about the Assumption as the culmination of a trajectory which began in the Immaculate Conception. The **Benedictus antiphon**, “This daughter of Jerusalem is lovely and beautiful as she ascends to heaven like the rising sun at daybreak,” evokes again the Song of Songs. Three of the **intercessions** cite themes I have already commented on:

Eternal Word, you chose Mary as the uncorrupted ark of your dwelling place,  
—free us from the corruption of sin. [the “ark” theme]

You are our redeemer, who made the immaculate Virgin Mary your purest  
home and the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit,  
—make us temples of your Spirit for ever. [the “solidarity” theme]

Lord of heaven and earth, you crowned Mary and set her at your right hand as  
queen,  
—make us worthy to share this glory. [the “solidarity” theme]

(The concluding prayer is also used as the first choice for the opening prayer of the Mass of the Day and is the closing prayer of EP II.)

**Mass during the Day**      The first choice for the **entrance antiphon** is “A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, the moon beneath her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head” (Rv 12: 1). This is the traditional antiphon (in Latin *Signum magnum . . .*”). The victory Psalm 98 is also traditional. The second choice for the entrance antiphon uses the generic festal opening (“Let us rejoice in the Lord and celebrate this feast”) and then identifies the feast being celebrated: “Let us rejoice in the Lord and

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<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 62:5 “As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.”

celebrate this feast in honor of the Virgin Mary, at whose assumption the angels rejoice, giving praise to the Son of God.” My Evangelical friends can take comfort in the fact the the angels are praising Christ and not Mary. The **alternative opening prayer** gets off to the right start by quoting Eucharistic Prayer III in its **invocation**: “Father in heaven, all creation rightly gives you praise, for all life and all holiness come from you.” But then its not too clear to me what we are asking God in the **petition**: “May we follow her example in reflecting your holiness and join in her hymn of endless life and praise.” “Join her”—*when* and *where* and *in what*? Obviously *now* and *here* and in the *Magnificat* (a foreshadowing of the gospel of the day Mass. But the hymn is referred to as her hymn of *endless life*, not just her hymn of praise—are we to infer *then*, *there*, and *for ever*? This could be clearer.

*The readings* The “ark” theme returns for a final explicit time<sup>10</sup> in the first line of **the first reading** (Revelation 11:19a; 12:1–6a, 10ab): “God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple.” For the wedding psalm of the lectionary I would substitute the responsorial setting of portions of the Song of Songs. It employs a double tone (reserved for festive occasions): The odd numbered verses are chanted on one chanting tone and the even numbered verses on the second, higher tone. In the ideal and at the ambo the women of the schola sing verses 2, 4, 6, and 10—as did the bridesmaids in the Song of Songs. A female psalmist, representing the bride, sings verse 5; and a male psalmist, representing the bridegroom, sings verses 1, 3, 7, 8, and 9. From the canticle itself arises the assembly’s refrain: “Come, my beloved, receive your crown.” There is no lovelier presentation of the nuptial theme of the Assumption than in the following:

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<sup>10</sup> It is implicit in the Visitation story of the day Mass’s gospel, ready for the astute preacher to reveal it.



Responsorial Psalm E 5

Song of Songs

(4:8b) 4:8ab, 3:6, 5:1, 6:10, 2:10, 8:5, 6:9b, 2:13b-14, 7:6

Y 1 Come with me from Leb - a - non, **my** —

bride; \* come with *me* *from* **Leb** - a - non.

R Come, - my be - lov - ed, re - ceive your crown. —

Y2 **What** — is that com - ing up from the

**wil** - der - ness, \* like a col - umn of smoke,

per - fumed with *myrrh* *and* **frank** - in - cense.

R Come, - my be - lov - ed, re - ceive your crown. —

- 3 I come to my garden, my sister, **my'** bride; \*
- I gather my myrrh **with** **my** spice.
- 4 Who is **this** that looks forth **like** the dawn, \*
- fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army *with* **banners**?
- 5 My beloved speaks and **sáys** to me: \*
- "Arise, my love, my fair one, and *cóme* away."
- 6 Who is **that** coming up from the **wild**erness, \*
- leaning upon *her* **bèloved**?
- 7 The maidens saw her and called her **háppy**; \*
- the queens also, *and they* **praised** her.
- 8 **Arise**, my love, my fair one, and **cóme** away. \*
- O my dove, let *mè* **see** your face,
- 9 let me hear your voice; for your **vóice** is sweet, \*
- and your *face* is **lovely**.
- 10 How **fair** and pleasant you are, O **lòved** one, \*
- delectablè **maiden**!

The **second reading** (I Corinthians 15:20–27) speaks of Mary’s discipleship—see the gospel of the Vigil—from an angle slightly different from that gospel. The focus of the reading is on hope, especially on hope for the destruction of death. Our tradition accommodates the following, “For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order. Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, *those who belong to Christ*” [my emphasis] to Mary, the foremost “belonger” to Christ. The **gospel** (Luke 1:39–56) has implicit ark themes all over it (as I hoped I showed in class) but the preacher might also want to explain the theology of the *Hail Mary* or “gnomic aorists”<sup>11</sup> of the *Magnificat*.

*The euchology (resumed)* The Simple Gradual offers a lovely ecclesiastical **antiphon for the preparation of the gifts**, as well as an evocation of the Eve/Mary typology:

#### Preparation of the Gifts Antiphon

IV A

To-day, O Mar - y, \* in your glo - ri - ous tri-umph,  
the gates of heav - en are o - pen to us.

There is so much lost in the current sacramentary’s translation of the **prayer over the gifts**<sup>12</sup> that I feel led to provide my own: “Lord, let the offering of our loving service ascend to you and, with the intercession of the most blessed virgin Mary, allow our hearts, set on fire with love, to climb up to be joined to you. Grant this through Christ our Lord.” The **communion antiphon** quotes the gospel: “All generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me” (Lk 1: 48–49) and all the official resources

<sup>11</sup> John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 75 (note 4).

<sup>12</sup> “Lord, receive this offering of our service. You raised the Virgin Mary to the glory of heaven. By her prayers, help us to seek you and to live in your love. Grant this through Christ our Lord.”

advise the singing of the *Magnificat* during the communion procession. The **prayer after communion** is well translated: “Lord, may we who receive this sacrament of salvation be led to the glory of heaven by the prayers of the Virgin Mary. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.”

**Daytime Prayer** The antiphons and readings are carefully designed to tie the whole day to the solemnity. Midmorning reminds us of Judith,<sup>13</sup> Midday tells who the noonday sun really is and what he has done,<sup>14</sup> and Midafternoon renews our flagging hope.<sup>15</sup>

**Evening Prayer II** EP II ties the past twenty-four hours together. The **second antiphon** underscores the nuptial theme of the day Mass, “The Virgin Mary was taken up to the heavenly bridal chamber where the King of kings is seated on a starry throne.” The **third antiphon** reminds us of our solidarity in the New Eve, “We share the fruit of life through you, O daughter blessed by the Lord.” The **reading** quotes 1 Corinthians 15:22–23 for the third and last time: “Just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will come to life again, but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits and then, at his coming, all those who belong to him.” The liturgical day ends quietly with the use of the **intercessions** of EP I and the **concluding prayer** of the day Mass. We have only to sing Psalm 91, Simeon’s Canticle, and the *Salve Regina* at **Night Prayer** to have the solemnity linked to the weekly feast of Sunday, the day of the Resurrection by which the Assumption is made possible.

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<sup>13</sup> “Holy Mother of God, you were raised up like a cedar of Lebanon, like a cypress on Mount Zion” (antiphon) and “Blessed are you, our God, who today have brought to nought the enemies of your people. Blessed are you, daughter, by the Most High God, above all the women on earth” (reading—Judith 13:17b, 18a).

<sup>14</sup> “We acclaim you, Mary, as Queen of heaven; the Sun of Justice came forth from your bridal chamber” (antiphon) and “A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (reading—Revelation 12:1).

<sup>15</sup> “The holy Mother of God is, exalted in glory, above the choirs of angels in the kingdom of heaven” (antiphon) and “We know that when the earthly tent in which we dwell is destroyed we have a dwelling provided for us by God, a dwelling in the heavens, not made by hands but to last forever” (reading—2 Corinthians 5:1).

## Bibliography

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The Latin texts from the Sacramentary are found in *Missale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani II Instauratum Auctoritate Pauli PP. VI Promulgatum (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis MCMLXX)*, 595–597.

The antiphons and psalms of the Simple Gradual are from Paul F. Ford, *By Flowing Waters: Chant for the Liturgy* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 219–226.

Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., “The Theological Context of and Introduction to Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*,” *Marian Studies* XXXVII (1986).

John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1975).

The Assumption of Mary into Heaven (often shortened to the Assumption) is, according to the beliefs of the Catholic Church, Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxy, the bodily taking up of the Virgin Mary into Heaven at the end of her earthly life. In the churches that observe it, the Assumption is a major feast day, commonly celebrated on 15 August. In many countries, the feast is also marked as a Holy Day of Obligation in the Roman Catholic Church.