

The Feast of the Assumption 2023

Revelation 11:19,12:1-6,10 , 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, Luke :39-56

Our past present and future with God.

You may have seen the news about new Russian history textbooks. Russian high-school children are getting history textbooks rewritten to carry Kremlin-approved narratives about the “special military operation” in Ukraine and rivalry with the West — part of a wider government effort to shape how young generations of Russians think about the war and Russia’s place in the world

The new texts cover the time frame from 1945. The West is blamed for the ongoing war in Ukraine and lovely quotes are included from President Vladimir Putin in which he asserts that: “Russia did not start any military actions but is trying to end them.” Truth is often first casualty of war of course. The invention of the Internet was intended to promote truth and information but the mighty and conceited have merely developed new ways of control and misinformation. Chinese youngsters cannot google the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and the thousands massacred by the communist authorities as they demanded rights and democracy. In their official history it did not happen. But what has this to do with us and indeed our feast today ?

Today’s feast of the assumption is reputed to be the oldest feast day of Our Lady though how it first came into common use is not clear. There isn’t a clear history in that sense. We don’t know how it first came to be celebrated it just did. We do know that some considerable time after it first appears, the Emperor Marcian made a request. He asked the Patriarch of Jerusalem to bring the relics of Mary to Constantinople to be enshrined in the capitol.

This request was made in 451 when bishops from throughout the Mediterranean world gathered in Constantinople at the Council of Chalcedon. No doubt with some dignified subtlety the patriarch explained to his emperor - there were no relics of Mary in Jerusalem. He tells the Emperor of the belief that she had she had died in the presence of the apostles; but her tomb, when later opened was found empty – and that the apostles themselves concluded that the body was taken up into heaven.

Many of the emperor Marcians predecessors were not only uninterested but determined to obliterate every historical trace and memory of Jesus from the Holy Land. Like today mighty men try to re-write history for their own vain-glorious reasons. Before the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in 305 the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed and rebuilt only in honour of Jupiter – the kings of the Gods – a not very subtle reference to the emperor himself. All that was left of the Temple was what we know now as the wailing wall.

Nevertheless the King of Kings and Lord of Lords born to a humble young girl from Nazareth ruled in peoples hearts that could not be destroyed. Oh how wonderfully prescient is Marys's song (the Magnificat) that we have today in our gospel. Oh how encouraging that it is recited every day by ordinary people throughout the world in their daily prayers. The spiritual and cultural memory and hope will not be crushed.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built in 336 and was followed by the restoration of many sacred sites of the life of Our Lord. They were not only celebrated by the people of Jerusalem but many pilgrims. One of the memories about his mother centered around the “Tomb of Mary,” close to Mount Zion, where the early Christian community had lived. On the hill itself was the “Place of Dormition,” the spot of Mary’s “falling asleep,” where she had died. The “Tomb of Mary” was where she was buried. It why in the eastern church it is the “dormition of Mary” that is celebrated rather than assumption.

These things are historical and important but not critical to our faith. In likewise manner titles and mechanisms should not bother us too much today. It is the memory, meaning and hope that should fill us with joy – the same joy that stirred the unborn John the Baptist in Elizabeth. The word is made flesh and dwelt amongst us. If last week’s feast of the Transfiguration is a little bit of Easter in ordinary time today we have a little bit of Christmas.

God comes in great humility to share our fragile and fleeting life that we may come with joy to share his glorious and eternal life.

The feast days of the Church are not just the commemoration of historical events; they do not look only to the past. They look to the present and to

the future and give us an insight into our own relationship with God. The Assumption looks to eternity and gives us hope that we, too, will follow Our Lady when our life is ended. Herein is our answer to the simple question: what this has to do with us?

Whatever God has done for Mary, God will do for us. Through baptism, we are cleansed of original sin like Mary. She brought Christ into the world likewise we are commissioned to bring him into the world by what we say and do. And as Mary was assumed into heaven, a place in heaven awaits us too. In our Gospel, Mary's great prayer of thanksgiving can be ours – our history our present and our future – that nobody can take away or destroy however powerful. When we proclaim the greatness of the Lord our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour. The king of kings and lord of lords is our story and our hope, for like Mary "The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

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