

HOMILY ~ AUGUST 14/15, 2021

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Today we celebrate the feast of the Assumption of Mary. Mary was assumed into heaven body and soul. Mary did not have to die because she never sinned. We call it the dormition of Mary. She did not die; she fell asleep and was assumed into heaven. Our hope is to achieve what Mary did. We have an immortal soul that will live forever; but our bodies will die due to sin, and we will be joined with our glorified body at the end of the world. Mary was assumed into heaven because she never sinned. She always did God's will. It is wise to discern God's will every day. That is part of what our personal prayer time should be about. One of the big picture things we need to discern in our lives is our purpose. I think we find our purpose in three different ways, and that is what I want to talk about today.

Everyone has a purpose from the time they were created. In the Gospel Reading, we hear that John the Baptist leapt in his mother's womb when Mary, who was carrying Jesus, came into the room. I think his purpose, to be a great prophet, was there even when he was in the womb. We all have a purpose. One way we can find our purpose in life is by a big event that happens in our lives. Mary had that event when the Angel Gabriel appeared to her and told her that she was to become the Mother of Jesus. I think that was clearly her purpose in life, and that is what she did, first and foremost. One of the Gospel passages that stick out for me as Mary the Mother of Jesus is the Wedding Feast at Cana. Mary tells Jesus that they have run out of wine. Jesus essentially says, that is not my problem, it is not yet my time. Mary makes it very clear to him that she wants him to solve the problem, as only a mother could do, and he does it. There are many examples of an event that can define our purpose. A child is killed by a drunk driver, and Mothers Against Drunk Drivers is born. A loved one dies of a rare disease, and someone spends the rest of their lives promoting research to find a cure.

A second way to find our purpose is to be inspired by someone who is what you want to become. That could have happened in the Gospel Reading. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, who is also having an unusual pregnancy. Elizabeth is of advanced age, and she is also carrying a child that will be very important in salvation history. Maybe she became a great mentor for Mary. Sometimes we are inspired by a teacher, a coach, a boss at work that takes you under their wing, someone who is doing very important work in the Church. We can find our purpose through someone we admire.

The third way we can find our purpose is by letting it develop over time. I think that is how John the Baptist found his life's purpose, which was to help people to prepare the way of the Lord, even before he knew who the Lord was. He was uniquely breaking new ground. He did not appear to have a mentor. There is no account of an angel informing him or a life event that triggered it. To determine

your purpose in this way, you have to pay attention to what is really fulfilling for you and what you are repeatedly drawn to. This is the way I discovered my purpose in life. My purpose in life is to help people. In high school, I was drawn to psychology because I knew I could help people with this knowledge. When I got my first job out of college, working with disabled people, what was fulfilling to me was helping individuals one person at a time. Getting ahead, being promoted, getting raises, all of that was part of it; and I held a number of different positions in that agency, but what I was always drawn to was helping people. After I graduated from law school, my first job as an attorney was doing medical malpractice defense. I was representing the hospital's interest. Now this is certainly an important job, defending the hospital's interests, but it did not fulfill my purpose. I needed to be interacting and helping individuals, and that was not part of the job. In my next job, I was helping GM hourly employees with their legal issues; and my purpose was again fulfilled. I was not drawn to practicing law in particular; I was drawn to helping people with my knowledge of the law. It was at that point that I could articulate my purpose in life. Up until that point, I was drawn to helping people; but if you asked me my purpose in life, I would not have been able to articulate it. My purpose, at this point in my life, is not to be a priest; it is to help people spiritually. Over time is the way that most people discover their purpose.

Notice in all three ways of determining our purpose, it is not done in isolation. People have told me that they have prayed for God to show them their purpose in life, and they are not getting an answer. Now certainly prayer is a very important part of discovering our purpose, but we have to interact with our environment. What are people telling you? What brings you joy? What gives you a reason to get up in the morning? What are you drawn to? What are the opportunities that are coming into your life? We need to sit with this in prayer and put it all together.

We all have a purpose in life, and it is important to discern your purpose. Once you have discovered your purpose, other decisions in your life get much easier.

So what is your purpose?

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim