

## Feast of the Assumption

Early tradition tells us that Mary went with John to Ephesus and died there. It is not surprising that just as Christians looked to her as the perfect disciple, free from the taint of sin from the first moment of her conception, and the perfect mother; just as they saw her as the one who was perfectly obedient to God's will in everything; so they saw her as the one who showed us how to die, as she had lived, in God's embrace. They knew that God took her to himself, the way God will take us all. To say her 'body' was assumed is to say that everything that comprised her real humanity, mysteriously transformed of course, was caught up in the eternal life enjoyed by her risen Son. Death could not separate her from him.

In 1950, after the carnage of the Second World War in which 'Christian' Europe, for the second time in a few years, had been tearing itself to pieces, Pope Pius XII felt the need to stress that Christian life is very much about the body. We can't pray 'in the spirit' and then treat the body with such disregard. It is every part of us that is taken up into life – transformed, of course, in a way that is beyond our imagining. Everything that makes us human is sacred. Having consulted the bishops throughout the world, the pope defined as an article of faith (and so infallibly) that Mary, the first and holiest of disciples, 'was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory'. This was not intended to separate her from us. On the contrary, it was to remind us that that is our destiny too.

Karl Rahner makes the important point: 'The definition of the Blessed Virgin's assumption does not tell us that this was a privilege which was reserved for her alone' (*Theological Investigations volume 17, page 122*). In the same article he writes: 'No one is in danger of defending a heresy if he maintains the view that the single and total perfecting of man in 'body' and 'soul' takes place immediately after death; that the resurrection of the flesh and the general judgment take place 'parallel' to the temporal history of the world; and that both coincide with the sum of the particular judgments of men and women' (page 115).

As with purgatory, so with heaven, we have to eliminate the idea of time, for time is the measure of things in the world we know. It is not a measure of eternity.

When we imagine our resurrection as happening 'at the end of time', we need to remember that imagining in terms of space and time is part of the hard-wiring of our brains. Beyond death, the notion of time is meaningless. Our prayer and our hope is that Jesus will come to us at the end of our time on earth, at our death, as he came to his mother, and draw us into God's embrace, with the whole of our human reality transformed fully by love.