SERMON-THE ASSUMPTION.

Today, we gather and honour Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God, this is one of many feast days of Mary during the year. Normally we would celebrate the 20th Ordinary Sunday of the year, but because this feast falls on a Sunday this year, we celebrate the Assumption of Mary today, and off course if it did fall midweek we would celebrate it as a holyday of obligation. In all that we celebrate about Mary though, we always remember that Mary is always presented to us in a particular way, that she points the way to Christ. This is where her greatness lies, speaking to us about the wonder of her son, Jesus Christ, in all that we believe about Mary, in all of her feast days, in all of the teaching about Mary, it’s purpose is to point us towards Christ, her Son. And this is what happens in all of our readings today.

In the book of revelation, we heard of this mysterious woman giving birth to a child—the child presumably is the Messiah, who saves mankind from the devil and the power of evil—the woman could be Mary, or perhaps the Church. Then we hear from St. Paul, who doesn’t talk about Mary, but talks of how Christ has overcome sin and death, and has won salvation for us, that he is the new Adam—and perhaps we ourselves could add, that Mary is the new eve—by agreeing to become the mother of the Saviour, Christ was able to become man and save us. And so just as Eve helped to condemn mankind because of her sin, Mary by what she did helped mankind to be saved, hence being the new Eve, with Christ being the new Adam. And then that wonderful Gospel reading—the story of the visitation, and Mary’s great song of praise—the Magnificat—how God has finally fulfilled all of his plans in and through her, and is now bringing relief to the poor and oppressed.

This hymn of praise is a wonderful piece of scripture, so special that it is a hymn that is sing every evening as part of vespers or evening prayer for priests and religious and for many lay people. Mary sings of God’s love for the poor and oppressed, that they will be raised up—Mary herself is an example of this, one of the poor, one of the almost invisible common people—and she literally, was, as we celebrate today, lifted up to heaven, body and soul because of her sinlessness.

This feast of the assumption, which celebrates Mary’s assumption into heaven body and soul has therefore strong overtones of Easter—of the resurrection, that what happened to Mary at the end of her life, can also happen to us. Even though many Christians question the validity or necessity of this claim, and it is quite a recent dogma of the church, only declared by the Pope in 1950, although of course celebrated as a feast for many centuries, it is at the very least a wonderful reminder of the hope we as Christians have—the hope in the resurrection. It also reminds us of what kind of resurrection we believe in—we believe in a bodily resurrection from the dead—that Mary at the end of her earthly life was assumed body and soul into heaven. We don’t believe that our fate is an escape from our body, that the body is somehow evil—but we believe in a bodily resurrection, that on the last day, our souls are reunited with our new risen and glorious bodies.

So our body is part of our very nature, as much us, as is our soul—and our fate, by virtue of our baptism and the power of the holy spirit, is the reuniting of our soul and body—but of course a body no longer exposed to death and corruption.

This is our Christian faith, and the dogma of the assumption of Mary reminds us of it. What happened to Mary will happen to us, that she is now bodily in heaven and one day we can join her there. So today, as we celebrate, Mary, we call to mind a central theme of our faith—that such is the power of
Christ, the power of his own resurrection, that we are wholly saved by God, everything that we are - body, mind, soul, heart is saved by him. What a wonderfully consoling and inspiring faith we have, and Mary reminds us of it, and points us towards it - the hope we have, of a life after this one, a life that she is already sharing in. Amen.