

**Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity 2020.
(Feast of the Assumption)**

Ezekiel 11:17-20. Romans 5:1-11. Psalm 105:1-7.
Luke 19:1-10.

The Collect for the tenth after Trinity: Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collects for the Feast of the Assumption: We beseech thee, O Lord; mercifully to forgive the sins of thy people; that we, who of ourselves can do nothing that is acceptable unto thee, may be succoured by the intercession of the Mother of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee now and forever. Amen. (*Anglican collect*)

Heavenly Father, who chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of our Lord and Saviour: grant that we may in all things accept thy holy will, and with her rejoice in thy salvation: through the same Jesus Christ, thy Son our Lord. Amen. (*Church in Wales Prayer Book*)

Almighty ever-living God, who assumed the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of your Son, body and soul into heavenly glory, grant, we pray, that, always attentive to the things that are above, we may merit to be sharers of her glory, through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (*Roman Catholic Collect*)

In giving birth you preserved your virginity. In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos. You were translated to life, O Mother of Life, and by your prayers, you deliver our souls from death. (*Orthodox, Troparion*)

Neither the tomb, nor death could hold the Theotokos, who is constant in prayer, and our firm hope in her intercessions. For being the Mother of Life, She was translated to life by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb. (*Orthodox, Kontakion*)

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Romans 5:1 ‘Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.’

Did you spot the difference between the Collects? They reflect different theological concepts about the Virgin Mary, and what we can do to ‘merit’ eternal life. There is reluctance in the ‘Protestant’ ones to allow that there might have been something superior about her compared to us. Collects have to be very carefully written in accord with the theology of their originator. Here is a link to a very short summary of an Orthodox view of Mary, whom they call Theotokos (God-bearer).

<http://www.holytrinitydanielson.com/articles/assumption-of-the-virgin-mary>

So, what has this to do with the verse from St Paul’s epistle to the Romans 5:1, which asserts we are justified by faith? If ‘we are justified by faith’, then what has the purported ‘Assumption’ of Mary (Catholic), or her ‘Translation’ (Orthodox), to do with justification by faith?

By the way, the Protestant assertion about what happened to Mary at the end of her earthly sojourn is... blank! The implication is that she died just like the rest of us, and that’s the end of that. Further, Paul says that ‘while we were yet sinners Christ died for us’ (5:8). If Mary was a sinner too, then Christ died for her. *Ergo* if she wasn’t a sinner, then Christ wouldn’t have needed to die for her (Romans 6:23 ‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.’) Push that a bit further and you might conclude that she didn’t deserve death, it wasn’t justified for her. Further still, Jesus’ death didn’t pay the price for her sins, and his death for ‘our’ salvation wouldn’t be needed for her. Why the special treatment? Simply(!), Mary reversed the sin of Eve.

Except... it wasn’t entirely unique. ‘Enoch died and God took him, and he was not found’ (Genesis 5:24. Hebrews 11:5). Likewise, Elijah was taken up (in a whirlwind) (2Kings 2:11). Moses’ body was buried by God, and no one knew where (Deuteronomy 34:6). These verses have been subject to dispute (along the same Protestant lines that I have alluded to above), but commentators generally accept that the biblical word ‘translated’, or ‘placed somewhere else’ (Greek: *metatithemi*), does apply in biblical cases. So, Mary’s ‘translation’ from earth to heaven was consistent with God’s treatment of Enoch, Moses, and Elijah. It was done to prevent people looking for their body, which should be of ultimate concern only to the Creator.

The Orthodox don’t fixate on whether or not Mary’s body died, but call it the Dormition (the falling asleep). When St Thomas came to pay his last respects, her tomb was empty. There is a Church of the Dormition

(incidentally in Benedictine hands) near the Zion Gate in Jerusalem. Roman Catholics believe she was 'assumed' body and soul into heaven. Whatever route you believe she went, we all have to leave our earthly body, because we suffer the effects of sin. Jesus didn't, nor did Mary.

However, we believe there is another event after our bodily death and the soul's judgement before the Tribunal of God. 'But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the *second* death.' (Revelation 21:8.) That's a fearful prospect isn't it? It is in view of this that St Paul's teaching makes sense to those who truly seek God with all their heart and mind. 'Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 5:1) Thus, faith removes our fear of the final judgement, the second death.

Mary, as our collects remind us, sought to do the will of God whatever the personal cost to her. She stands not only as a woman full of grace before God, but as one who intercedes for us. How we need her prayers.

Mary pray for us.

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be glory now and forever. Amen.