

Homily for the Solemnity of the Assumption 2010

By Fr Michael Casey

In Michelangelo's famous painting of the creation of Adam, found on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, God's finger reaches out and touches Adam's. This intimate, finger-to-finger contact results in an electric exchange of energy. Something new upon the earth! Adam rises to his feet, a living, spirit-filled creature unique on the face of the planet, gazing up into the heavens with all the intensity of heartfelt desire. For a time he stands upright, then imperceptibly this noble creature begins to bend down, back to the familiar things of earth until heaven is almost forgotten. The memory of the outstretched finger of God's life-giving love is now no more than a dull emptiness, edged with an unformed sense of guilt and shame. Something has been lost. Something in the depths of the soul has withered. The connection between heaven and earth has become faint and tenuous, and life on earth has become "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short".

Thereafter, while the human race went its own way, at various times and in various ways God continued to reach out to his creation by his Word – always with the intent of bringing to humanity a greater measure of vitality and spirit, and to issue a promise and a summons to eternal life. The response to this word from heaven was no more than a dull, barely recognisable echo. None had the capacity to absorb all that God wanted to give. God called and there was no response. It seemed that the banquet-hall of heaven would remain forever empty.

But in the fullness of time there was a new creation. A second Adam appeared to reverse the damage done by the first Adam. The Word of God became flesh, born of a woman at a particular time and place in human history. One in whom the fullness of the divinity dwelt, dwelt among us. One like us in all things but without the rupture that sin brings: the wilfulness that keeps us apart from God. One who moved among us while yet remaining in communion with the Father. Here was one who could re-establish the connection between earth and heaven, a mediator between humanity and its Creator. One human being who could respond in kind to God's outreach to earth.

It was, however, for our sake that the Word came to earth, aspiring to be the first-born of many brothers and sisters, to lead back to the Father's welcoming arms those who had stumbled and strayed and become lost. During his days on earth he showed us the way to a more abundant life and, at the end of his time

with us, he passed over to the Father to take his place at God's right hand. And before his visible presence ceased he said to those who were with him, "I am going to prepare a place for you".

Just as the Word-become-flesh always remained at his Father's side so, at the level of spirit, the ascended Word remains among us. "Behold I am with you always, even until the end of time." More than that, he remains with us as the permanent way or road to genuine life. "Where I go you cannot follow now: you will follow later." Christ remains, forever making intercession for us, our intermediary with God. He is our High Priest, our *pontifex*, our bridge-builder, spanning the space between us and God, making it possible for us to be connected to God in this life and calling us to pass over into God when our days on earth are complete. The connection between heaven and earth has been restored.

Today we celebrate the memory of the Mother of the Lord, the first of his disciples, the one who followed his way most perfectly on earth, the one who walked after him on the way that leads from earth to heaven. Today she hears the summons, "Behold the Bridegroom is coming, go forth to meet him!" Today the loving fidelity that bound Mary to her Son here on earth draws her to his embrace in the halls of eternity.

This is a joyful feast, because "Mary is one of us... She comes before God with us – like us and as one of our company – in the innumerable host of humanity." We rejoice for her sake, but we rejoice also for ourselves. "Mary is one of us." Where she has gone we also may follow. The Church sings in the Preface of the Solemnity:

Today the virgin Mother of God was taken up into heaven to be the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection, and a sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way.

It is our feast also. Mary has followed the footsteps of the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, she has accepted the guidance of the pathfinder, and walked securely on that road that has led her to eternal life. Where she has gone we also are called to follow, to seek the things that are above, confident that although we cannot see where the road leads, we accept that the way of Christ truly is for us the path to a blessed eternity.

Today heaven rejoices to receive the Mother of the Lord. Today and every day heaven awaits us, as the joyful culmination of a life lived in faith. Here on earth we have no abiding city, but we await one that is to come, where every tear will be wiped away, and there will be no more sorrow or grief. And the Lord God will be our light and our life for all eternity. Then will we surely join with Mary in singing a song forever new:

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for God who is mighty has done great things for me. Holy is God's name.