



# The Holy See

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 2 July 1997*

## ***Church believes in Mary's Assumption***

1. Following the Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* of my venerable Predecessor Pius XII, the Second Vatican Council affirms that the Immaculate Virgin "was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 59).

The Council Fathers wished to stress that Mary, unlike Christians who die in God's grace, was taken up into the glory of heaven with her body. This age-old old belief is expressed in a long iconographical tradition which shows Mary "entering" heaven with her body.

The dogma of the Assumption affirms that Mary's body was glorified after her death. In fact, while for other human beings the resurrection of the body will take place at the end of the world, for Mary the glorification of her body was anticipated by a special privilege.

2. On 1 November 1950, in defining the dogma of the Assumption, Pius XII avoided using the term "resurrection" and did not take a position on the question of the Blessed Virgin's death as a truth of faith. The Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* limits itself to affirming the elevation of Mary's body to heavenly glory, declaring this truth a "divinely revealed dogma".

How can we not see that the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin has always been part of the faith of the Christian people who, by affirming Mary's entrance into heavenly glory, have meant to proclaim the glorification of her body?

The first trace of belief in the Virgin's Assumption can be found in the apocryphal accounts entitled

*Transitus Mariae*, whose origin dates to the second and third centuries. These are popular and sometimes romanticized depictions, which in this case, however, pick up an intuition of faith on the part of God's People.

Later, there was a long period of growing reflection on Mary's destiny in the next world. This gradually led the faithful to believe in the glorious raising of the Mother of Jesus, in body and soul, and to the institution in the East of the liturgical feasts of the Dormition and Assumption of Mary.

Belief in the glorious destiny of the body and soul of the Lord's Mother after her death spread very rapidly from East to West, and has been widespread since the 14th century. In our century, on the eve of the definition of the dogma it was a truth almost universally accepted and professed by the Christian community in every corner of the world.

3. Therefore in May 1946, with the Encyclical *Deiparae Virginis Mariae*, Pius XII called for a broad consultation, inquiring among the Bishops and, through them, among the clergy and the People of God as to the possibility and opportuneness of defining the bodily assumption of Mary as a dogma of faith. The result was extremely positive: only six answers out of 1,181 showed any reservations about the revealed character of this truth.

Citing this fact, the Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* states: "From the universal agreement of the Church's ordinary Magisterium we have a certain and firm proof demonstrating that the Blessed Virgin Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven ... is a truth revealed by God and therefore should be firmly and faithfully believed by all the children of the Church" (Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*: AAS 42 [1950], 757).

The definition of the dogma, in conformity with the universal faith of the People of God, definitively excludes every doubt and calls for the express assent of all Christians.

After stressing the Church's actual belief in the Assumption, the Bull recalls the scriptural basis for this truth.

Although the New Testament does not explicitly affirm Mary's Assumption, it offers a basis for it because it strongly emphasized the Blessed Virgin's perfect union with Jesus' destiny. This union, which is manifested, from the time of the Saviour's miraculous conception, in the Mother's participation in her Son's mission and especially in her association with his redemptive sacrifice, cannot fail to require a continuation after death. Perfectly united with the life and savingwork of Jesus, Mary shares his heavenly destiny in body and soul.

4. The Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* cited above refers to the participation of the woman of the Proto-gospel in the struggle against the serpent, recognizing Mary as the New Eve, and presents the Assumption as a consequence of Mary's union with Christ's saving work. In this regard it says:

"Consequently, just as the glorious Resurrection of Christ was an essential part and the final sign of this victory, so that struggle which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her divine Son should be brought to a close by the glorification of her virginal body" (Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*: AAS 42 [1950], 768).

The Assumption is therefore the culmination of the struggle which involved Mary's generous love in the redemption of humanity and is the fruit of her unique sharing in the victory of the Cross.

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To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I extend a warm welcome to the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Melbourne in Australia and from the Archdiocese of Nairobi in Kenya who have accompanied their new Archbishops for the reception of the pallium. I also thank the choirs for their praise of God in song, especially the Choir of Lincoln College, Oxford, and the Cathedral Choir of Saint Louis, Missouri. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially the pilgrims from Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, Indonesia, Japan and the United States, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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