



On 15 August the Church celebrates the Feast Day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This feast originated in Jerusalem before the fifth century as the "*Falling-Asleep of the Mother of God*". It was adopted in Rome in the mid-seventh century and was renamed the "*Assumption*" in the next century. According to our faith, it celebrates when the Holy Mother, "*having completed her course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory*".

Although defined as an article of faith by Pope Pius XII just over half a century ago, the Assumption of Our Lady into heaven has been accepted from back to the earliest of Christian times.

The Assumption signals the end of Mary's earthly life and marks her return to heaven to be reunited with Jesus. While the bodies of both Jesus and Mary are now in heaven, there is a difference between the Assumption and the Resurrection. Where Jesus arose from the tomb and ascended into heaven by his own power, Mary's body was taken up to heaven by the power of her Son.

For this reason we use different words to describe each event. One is the Ascension of Christ and the other, the Assumption of Mary.

### **Historical Background**

Although some scholars insist there is no historical data to prove the historical fact of the Assumption, apart from faith, there is also strong and reasoned information to support the event.

1. No time in history has Christendom ever venerated a grave or tomb of the Blessed Virgin.
2. Until the 5th century of Christianity, there was not even a legend concerning her place of burial.
3. From the earliest of times of the church, the faithful have always venerated the relics of apostles and martyrs whose remains were preserved in shrines or caskets. However, there absolutely no relic of Our Lady's body in existence; nor has any person or city ever claimed possession of such a relic. It is difficult to believe that the sacred remains of Mary could have been lost or neglected.

4. In the first sixteen centuries of Christianity no reputable theologian or school of theology ever questioned the dogma of the Assumption. In addition there was also the solid and deep-rooted conviction among the first Christians that something extraordinary happened to Our Lady at the moment of her departure from this life. This found expression in writings, sermons, devotional practices, and prayers to Mary "assumed into heaven", and was followed by churches, religious orders, cities and nations across the world dedicating or consecrating to her under the title of Assumption.

The first person to ask about what had happened to Mary's body after her death, was St Epiphanius, a 4th Century bishop who devoted himself to the study of Mary's death and believed Our Lady did not die but instead was recalled to heaven.

The feast day of this holy and momentous event stems from the middle of the 5th Century when the Commemoration of the Mother of God was celebrated each year on 15 August in a shrine located near Jerusalem. More than 100 years later, the feast also commemorated the end of Mary's time on earth and was known as the "Dormition of Our Lady."

The feast was introduced to Rome in the 8th Century by Pope Sergius and from there it spread rapidly throughout western Europe. Towards the end of the century, Pope Hadrian gave the Feast Day its official name as the Assumption of Mary.

### **Dogma and Definition**

The Catholic Church teaches as dogma (*an official set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true*) that the Virgin Mary "having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory".

On 1 November in the Holy Year, 1950, the day after the closing of the International Marian Congress in Rome, Pope Pius XII solemnly defined the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven.

This great event took place in St Peter's Piazza in the presence of 40 Cardinals, 500 bishops, thousands of priests and more than a million of the faithful.

For many of the faithful, the most telling verification of the Assumption can be found in the medium of Mary's many apparitions which the Church has declared worthy of belief. Every year millions visit these places which now have become holy shrines honouring Mary including the Shrines of Our Lady at Guadeloupe, Lourdes and Fatima.





## **Prayer for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Pope St. Pius X**

O immaculate virgin, mother of God and mother of humanity, we believe with all the fervour of our faith in your triumphal assumption both in body and in soul into heaven where you are acclaimed as queen by all the choirs of angels and all the legions of saints; we unite with them to praise and bless the Lord who has exalted you above all other pure creatures and to offer you the tribute of our devotion and our love.

We know that your gaze, which on earth watched over the humble and suffering humanity of Jesus, in heaven is filled with the vision of that humanity glorified and with the vision of uncreated wisdom, and that the joy of your soul in the direct contemplation of the adorable trinity causes your heart to throb with overwhelming tenderness; and we, poor sinners whose body weights down the flight of the soul, beg you to purify our hearts so that, while we remain below, we may learn to see God and God alone in the beauties of his creatures.

We trust that your merciful eyes may deign to gaze down upon our miseries and anguish, upon our struggles and our weaknesses; that your countenance may smile upon our joys and our victories; that you may hear the voice of Jesus saying to you of each one of us, as he once said to you of his beloved disciple:

"Behold you son," and we who call upon you as our mother, we, like John, take you as the guide, strength and consolation of our mortal life.

We are inspired by the certainty that your eyes, which wept over the earth crimsoned by the blood of Jesus, are yet turned toward this world racked by wars and persecutions, the oppression of the just and the weak. From the shadows of this vale of tears, we seek in your heavenly assistance, tender mercy, comfort for our aching hearts, and help in the trials of Church and country.

We believe finally that in the glory where you reign, clothed with the sun and crowned with stars, you are, after Jesus, the joy and gladness of all the angels and the saints, and from this earth, over which we tread as pilgrims, comforted by our faith in the future resurrection, we look to you our life, our sweetness, our hope; draw us onward with the sweetness of your voice, so that one day, after our exile, you may show us Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb.

O clement, O loving,  
O sweet Virgin Mary.

Amen.

