

BULLETIN – AUGUST 14

Our summer holyday is celebrated tomorrow, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We shall have Masses at 8 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. The schedule for other area churches is found elsewhere in this bulletin, for your convenience. Please join us as we honor the Mother of the Lord and her eternal happiness with him in heaven.

The Assumption is a fine example of the definition of doctrine. This solemn definition took place in 1950, but the Christian churches had expressed belief in this event from the beginning. At the very least, we would have to say that there are no early witnesses *against* this belief. Pope Pius XII carefully sought the opinion of the world's bishops before make the solemn declaration, and the results showed no historical opposition until some separated Christian churches had begun to doubt or reject it after the Reformation. Many of those doubts and rejections simply had to do with a stubborn refusal to accept anything "Roman" or "Catholic," but the Assumption or Dormition of Mary has been celebrated from early centuries also in the Eastern (Orthodox) churches.

The doctrine was *defined* in the strict sense of that word. *Fines* or *funes* in Latin are limits or boundaries. A surveyor marks out the *fines* (FEE-nez) or *funes* (FOO-nez) of a piece of land. A *definition* of dogma or doctrine marks out just what we believe, and also what we don't. Mary's Assumption means that at the end of her earthly life, she was taken body and soul into heaven. She does not have to await the resurrection of the body, although her assumption is a corollary of the doctrine of the Resurrection, both Christ's and our own. We would search in vain for a grave containing the body of Mary. Surely such a tomb would have had a place in Christian devotion not far removed from Christ's own empty tomb. And yet there is no mention of such a landmark – only, in fact, of its *non-existence*, and the reason why: She had been assumed into heaven.

The definition also marks out what we *don't* believe, not so much by specifying it, but by not delving into matters which are more speculative or doubtful by nature. For instance, the dogma as defined does not answer the question of whether Mary actually *died!* As we said, the Eastern churches call this mystery the Dormition, or the "falling asleep," of the Blessed Mother. Don't use that to jump to the conclusion that Mary only fell asleep without dying, for Scripture itself uses the phrase "fallen asleep" for earthly death, particularly as regards the saints, the members of the Church (for instance, I Corinthians 15:6 and 18). Yet there are scholars who conclude that Mary's assumption means she was taken alive into the Kingdom of heaven without passing through the "passageways of death" (Psalm 68:21).

I personally find this position as peculiar as the rather amazing notion espoused by some that Christ was born of Mary without physically passing through the birth canal. One minute he was in her womb, they say, the next minute he was in the world, leaving her virginity intact from within as well as from without. Such a notion seems to conflict with Hebrews 2:17, where we read that Christ "had to become like his brethren in every way." And the Scriptural details of Christ's virginal conception and birth provide no evidence of any other unusual or miraculous physical details surrounding the events. The virginal conception occurred because God is his Father, not because God wished to avoid the human acts of procreation which he lovingly designed. But I digress.

Applying this train of thought, though, to the Assumption, it would be highly unusual for Christ himself to suffer death in his redemptive Paschal Mystery, while not

allowing the one who was so closely associated with him in that redemptive work to also experience death as a “making up in her own body what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ” (cf. Colossians 1:24). She becomes a second Eve, the mother of all the living, not only by standing at the foot of the cross, not only by being given as mother to all the beloved disciples of Jesus by Jesus himself, but by imitating her divine Son in going through the passageways of death. But let’s be clear: neither position is formal doctrine, and the matter is not attempted to be resolved by the dogmatic definition of the Assumption.

Finally, another matter which is not touched on by the definition is whether *anyone else* (St. Joseph, for instance, or Elijah, or other saints) might also have been assumed body and soul into heaven. That will perhaps be a matter of speculation until we are all together in the Kingdom of heaven, whether through assumption or resurrection of the body.

Uncommon – and saintly? – courage. We’re nearly all somewhat familiar with St. Maximilian Kolbe, the martyr of charity at Oświęcim (Auschwitz) during World War II. In fact, his feast day is August 14, the anniversary of his death 72 years ago. However, the name of Otto Schimek is hardly one to drop to start a conversation. Let’s get acquainted.

Otto Schimek was born in Austria on May 5, 1925, and died in Poland on November 14, 1944. He was just shy of 13 years old when Hitler absorbed their native Austria into Nazi Germany in the *Anschluss*, or annexation. Otto was one of thousands of Catholic Austrian youths drafted into the Nazi Army during World War II, but one of the few to stand up fearlessly to the Wehrmacht’s command. He had already told his family and others that he could not in conscience kill anyone. He was first deployed to Croatia, where he earned seven months in a German military prison in Poland for refusing to shoot. Upon his release, he was sent to an area of southern Poland where he was ordered to participate in the murder of civilian peasants. Again he refused, and was sentenced to death by firing squad. His final letter before his execution gives ample testimony to his witness for Christ: “I am in a happy mood. What do we have to lose? Nothing, only our poor lives, as they cannot kill our souls. What a hope! Today, I am going to heaven where the Father is waiting. May God guard you so that you will join me.” This from the pen of a 19-year-old man just hours before his execution!

St. John Paul II hinted that Otto’s cause for canonization might well be introduced. The young soldier was buried by the people of Machowa, who had been edified by seeing him praying at their wayside Marian shrines as he patrolled their roads. Word got around that he was the soldier who had refused to shoot them. When they found out that he had been executed that day in November, 1944, they took the risk of locating his body, exhumed him, and gave him a Christian burial. Over his grave, they erected a tombstone in his honor after the war. Now you know a little about Otto Schimek. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Getting to the bottom of it. The man walked up to the pharmacist, holding a bottle in his hand.

“Doesn’t mineral oil come from minerals?” he asked, somewhat perturbed.

“Well, yes, in a way,” the pharmacist admitted cautiously.

“And vegetable oil comes from vegetables?”

“It certainly does,” said the pharmacist, wondering where this was heading.

“Then how do you explain THIS?” the man inquired indignantly, holding up the bottle of baby oil.