

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Revelations 11:19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab; 1Corinthians 15:20-27; & Luke 1:39-56

The feast of the Assumption proclaims that, because of her special role as Mother of God, Mary was taken body and soul to heaven when she died. Mary's exaltation is often expressed with the title, Queen of Heaven. However, we have to be careful because we often tint the power of God and the saints with human ideas of power and our understanding of power frequently differs from God's.

In this week's gospel, Mary declares that God has chosen a slave-girl (her word for herself) to be the mother of the Messiah because God has a long history of upending human power structures. God "has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly." This sounds great if we are the lowly, but what if we are the mighty? My guess is that nearly everyone in my audience enjoys being privileged in some ways, maybe many. This passage – indeed, the entire gospel – challenges us to rejoice that God is upending our positions of power.

Let's look at an example of power being upended in our day. In 2008, the American Census Bureau announced that in the year 2042, white people would no longer make up the majority of Americans. This change means a loss of power. This loss was reinforced with the election of the first black president. Political scientist, Ashley Jardina, who studies the behavior of the white electorate, states that this generated a sense of fear and loss which "brought to the fore for many whites a sense of commonality, attachment and solidarity with their racial group, a sense of needing to band together to protect their place in the hierarchy."¹ Isabel Wilkerson, author of *Caste*, claims this underlying fear led to the election of President Trump and to the political and social impasse in America today.

Whether you agree with Jardina and Wilkerson, our society is clearly in the midst of racial change. It is messy and scary. Judging by the language used by some folks, the world seems to be ending. Revelations was also written in a seemingly apocalyptic time. It comforted by saying that the battle has already been won on a heavenly level. In the long run, good and God win. In the meanwhile, on the earthly plane, we still have to sort out the struggle. God invites us to examine personally, nationally and globally where we must be brought low so that others may live fully. Our most fundamental sinful tendency is our desire to have more power than we ought, "to be like gods" (Gn 3). We set up pecking orders in our playgrounds and work places, our families and our nations. It may seem great to be #1, to have unlimited choices, to buy what we want and use the planet as we please, but someone is paying the price. We need courage and respect for all human life to discern and welcome God's idea of how society should be.

One of Mary's virtues was her deep trust that God is moving us toward good; she called the messy change thrust upon her "mercy." If humans were running the universe, change would mean that the people on the bottom would simply replace those on the top and behave in the same self-centered way as their predecessors. But God is running the show. Jesus only and repeatedly demonstrates compassion and self-sacrificing love. We do not need to fear the power of God and the way it will change us. Paul tells us, "In Christ, all shall be brought to life." As we face the uncertainties of our times, no matter how threatening they may seem, we must trust that any human power we lose will lead us to the same exalted life as Mary and Jesus have.

- ❖ Which marginalized people do you blame for their lowly lot in life? Ask for God's help in acknowledging how unjust human power structures are at work in keeping them there.
- ❖ What situations in our society frighten you? Take your fears to God in prayer.

©08-08-21 Bernadette Rudolph

¹ Quoted in *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson. 2020. Random House, pp. 315-316.