



ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, August 15th, 2025)

Signum magnum apparuit in caelo.
A great sign appeared in heaven.
(*Ap* 12:1)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

IN THE IMAGE of the stained glass window of the Blessed Virgin and Child towering over the nave of our abbey church, which is dedicated to Our Lady in the mystery of her Assumption, the figure of Mary towers over this day, as attested by the texts. We contemplate Mary as she is taken up into heaven in her body and soul, borne near God by the angels.

The introit antiphon, taken from the Book of the Apocalypse, was composed recently, following the proclamation of the dogma by Pius XII, on November 1st, 1950:

And a great sign appeared in heaven: A Woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.^a

a. Ap 12:1.

This text is an admirable account of the triumph of the Blessed Virgin, now surrounded with heavenly glory. Its application to Our Lady is, for that matter, quite traditional. Yet, should we out of curiosity go back to the Book of the Apocalypse and try to put this text in its proper context, we

b. *Ap* 12:3.

might be quite surprised. This great sign, the first one in a series of seven, doesn't take place in Paradise. The presence of "a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems,"^b introduces us into the core of a fight that began even before creation of man, a fight between God and the angels who rebelled against Him, between good and evil. Man was at first foreign to this fight, but on Satan's first temptation, he, too, took the side of rebellion against his Creator and His law.

This fight kept being fought during Christ's temptation in the desert and during His whole life, climaxing during the Passion. For a moment, the prince of evil could think that he was victorious, when men thirsty with hatred and convinced to fight for their God killed the Master of life. But death was unable to keep captive Him Who is Life itself, and the resurrection of the Lord put the final seal on the victory of the Lamb, and of all who follow Him wherever He will go.

But who then is this woman who opened this morning's liturgy, and seems to be associated with this tremendous fight? Is she the Virgin of Nazareth?

Let us emphasise that this woman, this Lady, is worthy of honour. She is clothed with the sun, surrounded by the very light of God.

The context incites us to draw a parallel with another woman, Eve, who also encountered the dragon, accepted to strike a conversation with him, and finally succumbed to his temptation. The woman of the Apocalypse has the moon under her feet. The moon is the star that waxes and wanes, the face of which is ever changing. It is the symbol of time that flees. It evokes our own weakness, our characters which are so fickle, so "lunatic."^c The woman of the Apocalypse has the moon under her feet. She has dominion over that which is changeable, she, the faithful woman.

c. Latin *lunaticus* =
"under the influence
of the moon."

The text of the Apocalypse specifies that this woman is pregnant, and even in the pains and sufferings of labour. This couldn't possibly refer to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, during which, according to a constant tradition, Mary was exempt of any pain.

We may perhaps recognise in the woman the Church, whom Mary personifies at the highest degree on the Calvary. At that very moment, she became the Mother of the Church, the Mother of each of us, our Mother. And in the pains of childbirth, the Church is ceaselessly begetting the Risen One in the fullness of His mystical body, until the very last day in the history of mankind, by offering Him to a persecuting world.

After that, the text tells us the flight of the woman to the desert, in a place prepared by God, whereas Michael and his angels fight against the dragon. Vanquished, the dragon was cast down on earth, and his angels with him. He then wanted to attack the woman, and “went to make war with the rest of her seed, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus,”^d that is to say, on the whole Church.

d. Ap 12:17.

The evocation of chapter 12 of the Apocalypse doesn't detract in the least from today's joy. It sheds a new light on it.

On the one hand, Mary appears in glory. Let us give thanks for the all-glorious Mother the Lord gave us.

On the other hand, Mary isn't foreign to our fight. The stained glass window we already mentioned reveals the loving gaze with which Mary, *Mater Dei*, Mother of God, looks at the Son she holds in her arms. She keeps considering each of us with this same gaze. In this gaze, she is our help, our advocate.

In this woman lies a great sign, a sign that exists exclusively to be received and understood. This sign is meant for us. It comes straight from her who is already in glory, and is meant for those who are still dwelling in this vale of tears. This sign bears witness to the fact the link between the Virgin and each of us is still valid, still alive. It behoves us to cultivate it. Mary's holiness and glory cannot hinder her propinquity to each of her children.

The Christian religion is not a religion of the Book. It is an encounter with a living person, Christ. Mary, too, is alive. Today's antiphon for *Magnificat* at Vespers will begin with the word *Hodie*, “Today.” This word refers us to an *Hodie* that is both in the past and in the present, the *Hodie* of the past inciting us to live to the full the present time *Hodie*.

Today, everyday, from heaven Mary signals to us, she calls us. Let us say the Rosary. Let us meditate on the mysteries of her life. This is a safe path towards holiness, a path on which so many men and women have walked.

The great sign Mary offers us is first and foremost the testimony of her life of union with God. If the present moment gives me the possibility to encounter Mary, this moment is the sole place in which I can make the choice to do God's will. In this "now," in this *hodie*, I'm given the opportunity to grasp God's proffered hand, to make use of the gifts of His providence, which are never lacking.

The saints' edifying lives have never been lived as a whole. They are but the sum of crumbles of time in which God was chosen again and again, until the very last moment.

Mary, the all-holy, the all-pure, was chosen by God, and she herself chose God only. She is the all-close to God.

Because at the foot of the Cross Jesus gave her to us as our Mother, because He gave her to the whole Church, Mary, the all-merciful Virgin, is also the all-close to us. Let us enter her school, and remain her children.

Trahe nos Virgo immaculata, post te curremus in odorem unguentorum tuorum. "Draw us, O Immaculate Virgin: we will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments."

Amen, Alleluia.

