

# Fact of FAITH

## The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

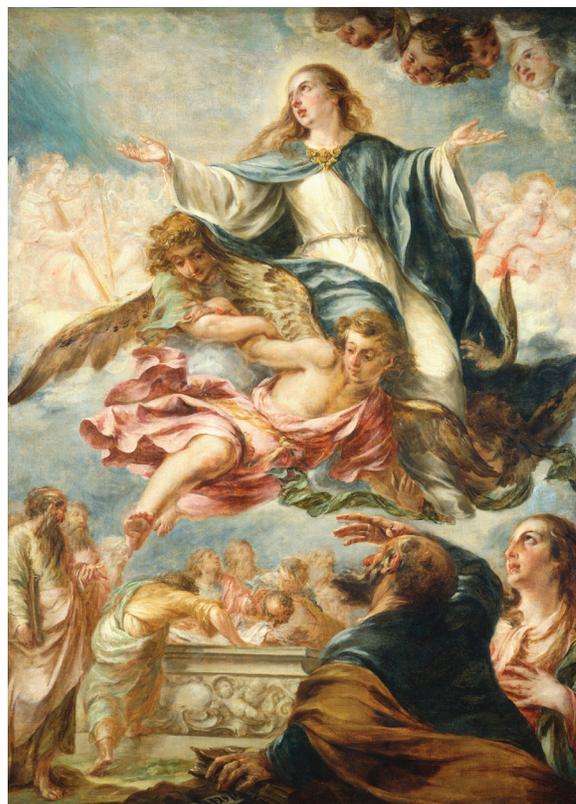
by Larry Rice

On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which the Church celebrates every year on August 15. Simply put, the dogma of the Assumption states that at the end of her life, the Blessed Virgin Mary was taken, body and soul, into heaven.

While this event isn't reflected in Sacred Scripture, it is clearly part of the Church's earliest observance. In the sixth century, St. John Damascene wrote in one of his sermons, "Your sacred and happy soul, as nature will have it, was separated in death from your most blessed and immaculate body, and although the body was duly interred, it did not remain in the state of death, neither was it dissolved by decay; your most pure and sinless body was not left on earth, but you were transferred to your heavenly throne."

Theologically speaking, death is often understood to be a consequence of original sin. Since Mary was conceived without Original Sin, some theologians have wondered if Mary died or if perhaps she was taken into heaven without experiencing death. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* doesn't answer this question but simply states, "The most blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven" (no. 974).

The Solemnity of the Assumption reminds us of the unique role that Mary served in the process of our salvation. Although she was without sin, we have the possibility of receiving God's forgiveness for our sins



through Christ. Her entry into heaven prefigures our own hope of experiencing the same eternal life.

Ordinarily, the celebration of the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a holy day of obligation for Catholics, but when it falls on a Saturday or a Monday, that obligation to attend Mass is lifted.

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