

Feast of the Assumption 2020: Fearless

The Rev. Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, August 15, 2020

Given the breadth of the Anglican Tradition for some of us today is observed as the Feast of the Assumption wherein we believe that St. Mary of Nazareth was bodily assumed into heaven. For others today is simply the Feast of St. Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Full stop.

The concept of the Assumption of Mary is not required doctrine for Anglicans but is respected and allowed for, given that this teaching is present throughout Church history.

I, personally, believe that Mary was both assumed into heaven and that she was conceived in grace. In this case, I trust the Tradition of the Church.

She was to become the very Ark of God. I do not think God would make his abode with just anyone. She needed that grace to accomplish her mission.

I believe she was assumed into heaven for the same reason as Elijah: in her assumption God's glory and purposes for all of us are further revealed.

Additionally, I believe these things about Mary because by the grace of God, she was fearless.

When the Angel of the Lord comes to Mary, she is perplexed and asks a question but not afraid. When she is assured that nothing is impossible with God, she says, "All right. Of course, let it be with me as you say."

Throughout the Gospel according to Luke Mary does not react. She ponders. She is the model of consistent and trusting discipleship.

She is the model of how to respond to God breaking into our world and transforming it. She is not afraid to participate. She is not afraid of the awkward humiliation of being unwed. She does not shrink from her duty to be the mother of this man who will suffer misunderstanding, harassment, torture, and death.

She is fearless in becoming exactly who God made her to be.

St. Bede wrote that as Mary sings, "*For the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name,*" she "attributes nothing to her own merits. She refers all her greatness to the gift of the one whose essence is power and whose nature is greatness, for he fills with greatness and strength the small and the weak who believe in him."

I believe it is not at all coincidental that we observe two fearless saints the day before this feast. They both had profound connections to Mary.

Fr. Maximillian Kolbe was a priest from Poland during the Holocaust. Early on he had a vision of Mary and spent his ministry encouraging others to know about her.

On February 17, 1941, Kolbe was arrested by the German Gestapo. Eventually he was transferred to Auschwitz. Even in that death camp, he practiced his faith publicly despite great harassment and violence.

Near the end of his second month in Auschwitz, a group of men were chosen to face death by starvation to warn against escapes. Kolbe was not chosen but volunteered to take the place of a man with a family.

He continued to lead prayers and remained a calming presence for the other prisoners. After two weeks of dehydration and starvation, he was the last one living. The guards gave him a lethal injection of carbolic acid. Kolbe died on August 14, and his remains were cremated the next day on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary.

On our Episcopal Calendar we commemorate Jonathan Myrick Daniels on August 14.

Near Daniels' last year of seminary in 1965 he felt called to go to Selma, Alabama. He was compelled to join the struggle for civil rights. He said this calling was deepened one evening as he attended Evening Prayer in the Seminary Chapel. The words in the Song of Mary captured him: "He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek."

Daniels along with others was jailed in Selma for joining in a picket line. After they were released, they fled to a nearby store to hide from the mob. At the entrance of the store stood an angry man with a shotgun. He began hurling curses at 16-year-old Ruby Sales. Daniels pushed her aside and stood in front of the group. He was shot and killed. He was twenty-six.

In a letter from Selma he wrote, "The doctrine of the creeds, the enacted faith of the sacraments, were the essential preconditions of the experience itself. The faith with which I went to Selma has not changed: it has grown...I had been truly baptized into the Lord's death and resurrection."

Fearless. Not reacting but responding. Not retaliating but sacrificing.

Today as we think of St. Mary the Queen of Saints, the greatest Payer Warrior that ever lived, she who inspired fearless disciples like Maximilian and Jonathan to help heal the world, let us ask ourselves, “Who has God made me to be? What grace has he provided for me to become that person? Where am I being called to be fearless in the Name of Jesus Christ?”

Reference to St. Bede: <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/saints/feastofthevisitation/>
Quote from Daniels: Lesser Feasts and Fasts 1996