

A.M.D.G.

Homily, Assumption of Our Lady, 2019

“For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ.”

When I was in the novitiate, one of my novice brothers and I were sent to Tijuana Mexico to work at a soup kitchen run by Franciscan Sisters. We spent most of the time chopping vegetables, handing out tortillas and mopping floors over those four months. While we were there we came to know a family whose eight year old son, Mario, was very sick. The sisters were helping him with medical treatment. He had brain cancer. A Catholic family in San Diego paid for him to have surgery to remove the tumor, but the cancer had come back. But he was still going over to San Diego regularly for treatment. He couldn't walk at this point as the tumor was affecting his motor neurons. So our job was to pick him up from his wheelchair, place him in the car, and then help him out of the car, back in the wheelchair, and into the hospital. I will never forget the feel of his body. It is one thing to hold a soft, tender baby, or help a big, strong rugby player off the field, but it is quite another to carry a broken body in one's arms, one in which you can almost feel the pain crossing over into you like an electric current.

Mario's broken body is an image for us of the universal human condition. We are all subject to corruption and death. No matter how great the doctors, and how advanced the medicine, our bodies will break down and die eventually. The tragedy is not that humans die, but rather that humans do not avail themselves of the offer of the redemption of their bodies.

The solemnity that we celebrate today, the assumption of Mary into heaven, speaks to us precisely of the redemption of our bodies. Mary, in the tradition, has always been named as the New Eve, the mother of the new humanity. Adam and Eve, that is, the first human beings whoever they were, were offered a gift from God, love and union with him, and everlasting life. But they, as we know, turned God down, and turned away from him. That turning away from God, which we call sin, ended up being the defining characteristic of what came after them. For their descents did not turn back to God, but developed this 'tradition of sin' one might say, down through the centuries, all the way to us. Bitter indeed are the fruits of this tradition, plain for all to see in our world today. But, as we know, God did not give up on this wayward species that he had created. Empowered by his infinite love, he continually called them back to himself until,

eventually, he decided to start again. He created a New Adam, the God-Man Jesus Christ, and a New Eve, his mother Mary, in order to be the beginning of a new humanity, that no longer lived under sin, but lived a new tradition, one characterized by the knowledge and love of God and love of neighbor. Today we celebrate the triumph of that new humanity in Mary's assumption into heaven. For even though Mary's body was subject to physical corruption, by being united to God spiritually, her body was able to be redeemed, transformed, and assumed into heaven. For all those humans who step out of the old tradition, the tradition of sin started with Adam, and into the new tradition, started with Jesus, Mary is the exemplar of what is to come for them after death.

Mario eventually died from cancer, and we buried him with great lamentation. But I will never forget what one of the sisters said as we came back from the funeral. 'He is with God,' she remarked, with a spirit of peace. I hope that we will all say the same about ourselves, and our loved ones, as we await the redemption of our bodies.