



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

August 2019

My dear friends and colleagues,

This month marks the feast of Mary's Assumption into Heaven, also known as The Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and The Dormition of Our Lady.

There's a story about a young person from a staunchly protestant background who was asked "Who was the Virgin Mary?" And after a brief pause for thought the reply came – "She's a dead Roman Catholic." Well I hope that we all might have moved on at least some distance from that rather primitive and prejudiced response.



The first thing to note in regards to Our Lady's death is that it is an event shrouded in mystery. We have no real knowledge of the day, year, and manner of her passing and, though the dates assigned to this occasion vary between three and fifteen years after Christ's Ascension, both Jerusalem and Ephesus claim to be the place where she died!

Yet despite these geographical uncertainties ancient tradition tells us that Mary died in the presence of all the Apostles. Furthermore when her tomb was opened after her burial, it was found to be empty. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the Patriarch of Jerusalem explained this to Emperor Marcian. This discovery led to the conclusion that her body must have been taken up (assumed) into heaven. This belief, handed down from the time of the Apostles, became widely held.

But in more recent times some have attempted to pour scorn on this devotion. It is a sad fact that since the reformation, and especially in this country, Mary has become a figure who causes deep suspicion in the minds of protestants, and many such people have sadly been brought up to treat her even with contempt and derision. I have never understood this cynicism concerning Mary's role in salvation. How can anybody take delight in finding fault in a life of such simple obedience, faith and generosity? Why do some people so disdain the very mother whom Jesus held dear? Why do they deride the incredible woman who stood at the foot of His cross and wept? Why turn against someone who only ever points to Jesus? So let us look afresh at the Assumption, with eyes of faith and not suspicion. For though it is true that the Bible contains no mention of this event, it is nevertheless part of Christian tradition and contains much that is good.

With every blessing

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WHAT SHOULD YOU GET OUT OF WORSHIP? – by Father Jonah Bruce (reproduced with permission)

Most people think they should get something out of worship. I was told once by a disappointed parishioner that he came to church “to get a charge” out of the service, and that he wasn’t “getting a charge”. I didn’t ask what he thought “getting a charge” meant – but I assume he meant that he wanted the kind of experience he had at a good movie, or a good concert, or after an exciting sports event.

Christian worship isn’t about this kind of surface engagement. It’s not primarily emotional – it isn’t designed to produce an emotional response. And it’s not primarily intellectual – it isn’t designed to provide information. It’s primarily spiritual – it’s designed to feed the soul.

The problem is that most people are not engaged spiritually at a level where they’re even aware of the needs of their souls. Christian worship, which is nothing other than the making-present of the Crucified and Risen Christ, who feeds us with his very Body and Blood, ministers to us at a level so deep that most of us aren’t even aware of it most of the time.

But we’re not Gnostics – our worship isn’t disembodied: there are many avenues for the engagement of the senses. There are sights, sounds, and smells associated with worship. There are postures (such as kneeling). There are (or should be) silent spaces. These avenues for sensory engagement, however, don’t overwhelm. They offer. What’s required of the worshipper is quiet, prayerful attention, and the offering of the self to God.

There’s a very good essay in the People’s Anglican Missal called “How to Worship at the Eucharist”, and it notes that we should throughout the Mass identify ourselves with the oblations – the bread and wine which are placed on the altar at the Offertory. It is this offering, and not the money collected in the plate, which is the real subject of the Offertory. When we identify ourselves with this offering, we realize that our primary job as worshippers is to show up and to offer ourselves. What we receive is grace, and as we grow in grace we grow in our ability to undertake the conscious offering of ourselves to God. We give ourselves to God, and he gives himself to us.

This is why attempts to “increase participation” in the Eucharist totally miss the point. Our participation in the Liturgy doesn’t come from being an acolyte or an usher or a reader or a singer – it comes from praying the Liturgy and offering ourselves. If you seriously undertake this self-offering, you will quickly realize that it engages every faculty of your mind and body: it is total involvement in the movement and drama of the liturgical Action. It’s hard to be more involved, or to participate more!

The way into this wonderful experience of worship is to abandon every thought of what you should get out of worship. Allow the elements of the Liturgy (which, after all, is the work of the Holy Spirit) to support and carry you as you offer yourself to God. Use the time immediately before the Liturgy to examine your conscience and to pray for grace to worship. During the first part of the Liturgy, as we pray and hear the Scriptures, think of this as your re-orientation away from the cares and pleasures of the world and as your entry into the Tabernacle of God. At the General Confession, recall the particular things you covered in your examination of conscience and make those the things for which you are asking forgiveness.

At the Offertory, imagine that you are placing yourself – your goals, thoughts, priorities, likes, and dislikes – on the altar with the oblations, and surrendering them to God to be transformed by him. At the Consecration, as the bells ring, remind yourself that Christ has re-created the bread and wine and made them his very Body and Blood; ask him to re-create you in his image and likeness. Ask him to make your heart his home.

After you receive Holy Communion, offer thanks to God for the miracle in which you have just participated and ask him to make your life conformed to the life of Christ which you have received. At the conclusion of the Mass, don’t rush out. Offer God another prayer of thanks and renew your offering of yourself, asking God to be with you in the coming days and to bring you back again to his altar.

What should you get out of worship? Christ! Some days you will be tired; some days affected by other things in your life; some days everything will seem to fit into place. But if you offer yourself to God in the Eucharist, seeking to get out of it only God Himself, then you will find that all will be well, and worship will be a continual revelation.

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(At the risk of self-indulgence I will often use as a “desk picture” some Isle of Sheppey scenes photographed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it!)