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Homily for the Feast of the Assumption of Mary

Abdel Sepúlveda-Sánchez

The theology of the Feast of the Assumption can be summarized in two sentences:

- 1) Mary, as the mother of Jesus, experienced the fullness of salvation once her time on earth was over, meaning that she was assumed into the reign of God in body and soul.
- 2) We too will experience this when Jesus comes in glory on the last day.

The church teaches that Mary enjoys this privilege because of her role in the history of salvation. This is fair, after all, if this were up to me, I would too prioritize my mother over everyone that I know to experience something as precious as eternal love and peace in God's presence. It's quite a human thing to do and I rejoice in that. Other than that, there is not much I can say to reflect on the assumption. How did it happen? We don't know. Does it matter if we know the details? I would say no. What is important is that the theology of the assumption is an aspirational faith statement that gives us hope, joy, and great consolation as we visualize everlasting life with our loved ones.

Therefore, instead of using this sacred time to delve into a theological anthropology and historical explanation of this feast, I will use it to reflect on a different way to understand Mary. In today's homily I invite you to see Mary as someone that relies on relationships, as an activist, and as an agent of transformation.

It is common to see the phrase "*It is the relationship that heals*" in hospital and clinical settings. Medical doctors, mental health professionals, nurses, and hospital staff are trained on ways to make this concept part of their daily practice by using empathy, mindfulness, and

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trauma-informed practices to form that very necessary therapeutic relationship between the practitioner and the client. At my school, my teachers and students have modified this phrase to say “*It is the relationship that saves.*” We do not use the verb *save* in the theological concept of salvation, but as an action that enables students to use their agency to grow intellectually, physically, and in character. We have coded it into our school’s vision where it states that “*We are committed to create and sustain positive and strong relationships with our students as we help them to live up to their fullest potential.*” What we are, the core of our beings, is reflected in the relationships that we have in our lives. Past, present, and future relationships form us. The people with whom we share space and time complete us and we complete them. Given what we know from the Synoptic Gospels, from the Gospel of John, and from the Book of Acts, Mary understood this well. From the beginning of her story in the annunciation to the coming of the Holy Spirit in pentecost, we meet a woman who sees the importance of having the right relationship with God and God’s people. Even in those moments when she did not quite understand what was being asked of her, she always relied on the existing relationship.

When the Archangel Gabriel greeted her during the annunciation narrative, Luke writes that Mary was confused and wondered what such greeting might mean. She also questioned how she could be with child if she was still a virgin. That said, trusting in her relationship with God she said: “*Here I am, I’m God’s servant. Let it happen to me as you’ve said.*”

At the wedding at Cana she notices the lovers’ predicament and says to her son “*they have no wine.*” Even after her son’s admonishment, trusting in her relationship with Jesus, she instructed them to “*do whatever he tells you.*” On a side note, I have always pictured Mary pulling Jesus aside and telling him: “*Don’t you ever talk to me like that again. I don’t care if you are the Only*

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Begotten One, I am your mother and you will respect me. So, do what you have to do!" (I might be projecting here.)

Throughout her son's public ministry, she worries about his mental health and with her family she goes to rescue him. At the foot of the cross, fear of death did not deter her from staying in relationship with her son until he uttered the words "*it is finished.*" Even after his ascension into heaven, as scripture and tradition teach us, she continued the relationship with the apostles.

And of course, one of the best examples that Mary understood the importance of relationships is illustrated in Luke's account of the visit to her cousin Elizabeth. The narrative draws us into a loving, joyful, and prophetic relationship between two pregnant women that knew that for God everything is possible. Not only did they celebrate that God had allowed Elizabeth to conceive after her child bearing years were over and that Mary was with child while virgin, but they also rejoiced in a God of justice, a God who sides with the oppressed and the lowly, and a God who condemns abusive relationships and the exploitation of the other. How does God do this? By dethroning those that use their power to inflict psychological, financial, and physical pain in God's people.

As we can see, Mary was a woman shaped by those she related to: the angel, Joseph, Elizabeth, the magi, her child, her family members, her son's friends, the crowd that followed Jesus, the men that condemned and executed the fruit of her womb, and of course, God. For this reason I'd like to suggest that we look at Mary as a relational figure that knew who and when to trust.

She also knew who, what and when to challenge.

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This a good segway to invite you to see Mary also as an activist who challenged unjust laws and status quo norms.

The very essence of the Mary's Magnificat is a challenge to the accepted order of things. The structure of power that most known civilizations have used for millennia is turned upside down. In her canticle, Mary, without any doubt in her message, teaches us that God rescues and lifts up the poor while scattering the proud in their conceit.

Notice that she does not introduce us to a God of prosperity and material wealth, but to a God that rights wrongs and restores things to their proper order. Mary would have been qualified today as a radical leftist nasty woman by the very people that claim to be her son's most ardent followers.

According to the gospels, Mary has more in common with women such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Dorothy Day, AOC, and Ayana Prestly than with the members of the One Million Moms organization.

Based on what Matthew's gospel tells us, Mary and her spouse would do anything to save their kid's life. They would go as far as to leave their home country to find refuge in a foreign land. Thus making Mary a law breaker and positioning her closer to the millions of displaced mothers across the world and across our nation willing to break the law and risk their lives in order to keep their children alive.

By standing at the foot of the cross, committed to stay with her son until the end, puts Mary in the same position as the mothers of Trevon Martin, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice, and Atatiana Jefferson among others.

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She was not a soft demigod who wore royal garments in first century Judea. She was not a fragile queen that looked at people with her head tilted ever so slightly to the right while clasping her hands in a prayer. No, Mary was a doer and a fighter in her own way. The sanitized version of Mary with which the Church, artists, and traditions have presented us is a disservice to God's people and dishonors her legacy.

I invite you to claim Mary as the daring and strong woman that we meet in the Gospels. A woman that the Church, in its attempt to highlight her a special place in the history of salvation, has placed so distantly from us, that it is hard for many to relate to her. She simply cannot be considered fully human in the way the church continues to present her to us.

Take for example the Church's obsession with Mary's virginity. The ancient synod of the Roman church says that Mary was *virginitas antepartum* (virgin before birth) makes sense, *in partum* (during birth), and *postpartum* (after birth). Wow! Why is this important? The miracle of the incarnation is what's essential in the salvation history, what happened *in partum* and *postpartum* is part of the laws of physics and biology. Moreover, as the Church elevates Mary as the model for all women to follow, what message are cisgender and transgender women getting when we focus on the physicality of Mary's virginity? While I know that this audience understands this, I would emphasize that cisgender and transgender women (and everyone else of course) are called by name to be in a relationship with our creator and with creation regardless of their sexual history or biological realities. What God requires of us is to act with justice (Matthew 5: The Beatitudes), to love and serve our neighbor (Matthew 25: The goats and the sheep), and to be open to God's grace (Matthew 6:26: The birds in the sky).

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The Church has forced a Marian narrative that kept her from meeting important stages of human development necessary for anyone to live life to the fullest. It celebrates the image of the suffering heart of Mary. It exalts the concept of Mary queen of the universe while totally discarding the image of a sexually matured married woman. A woman who experienced skin hunger just like you and I. A wholesome woman whose God-given intimacy needs made her perfectly normal and holy. We have been sold the image of an asexual and transcendental Mary, when in fact we should have embraced the image of a transformative Mary.

In my opinion, this makes Mary one of the earliest victims of unhealthy sexual theologies and moralities. Transformative Mary suffers similar struggles as our transgender friends for whom unhealthy understandings of sexuality and gender have created and perpetuated institutionalized violence against them. Today, I would also like us to see Mary as someone in solidarity with transgender people of all ways of life. The majority of whom are targeted by secular and religious policies that force them to skip multiple stages in their development resulting in mental health issues, sickness, and even death. I invite you to focus on the trans part, as in beyond, of this transformative Marian narrative that the church has failed to promulgate. May Mary's trans nature help us understand that our work in creating an inclusive and safe world is far from over. May it keep us focused on our advocacy. And may it help us bring protection, healing, and joy to everyone that needs it, but in particular to our transgender siblings.

As we continue with our liturgy, may these three natures of Mary- Relational, Activist, and Transformative- help us develop a new relationship with her in order to make the world she describes in the magnificat a reality.

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In order to start this, I shortened and modified the litany that is prayed at the end of the rosary.

At this moment I will invite you to unmute yourselves and say “Pray for us” after each invocation. Once the last invocation is recited, please mute yourselves again.

Holy Mary ...Pray for us

Mother of Christ....Pray for us

Challenger of the unjust...

Protector of those seeking refuge...

Advocate of those who suffer...

Joy of living life to the fullest....

Relational Mary....

Activist Mary.....

Transformative Mary....

Mother and friend of every LGBTQIA+ person....

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