

## HOMILY FOR FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION

August is a strange month. The summer is waning. Yet the Fall is not yet here. Vacations are spent but school still is yet to begin. This is the month we celebrate victory. We commemorate the end of World War II. And so we celebrate peace. And yet August is also the month of Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- perhaps the greatest symbols of the carnage of war and of the inhumanity with which we sometimes inflict on each other.

In the midst of this month of opposites, we celebrate the Assumption of Mary. And we should be clear what is so important about this feast.

The key is found in the second reading. The resurrection of Christ is called the “first fruit of those who have fallen asleep.” This “first fruit” is a Jewish ritual term. It signifies the custom of offering the first sheaf of the harvest back to God. And this first sheaf is considered a symbol of the entire harvest. So when Paul speaks of Christ as the first fruits to rise from the dead, he is saying that the whole crop will follow.

And Mary is the first of this “whole crop” to follow Christ. Each of us, in turn, will follow. In celebrating her journey from death to life, we celebrate ours as well.

And from this flows one very important lesson. When God glorifies the body of Mary and allows her to share in the victory of his Son, God also teaches us how sacred and how important our own bodies are. God teaches us that the gift of life is very precious. And that life should never be taken for granted, destroyed or wastefully used. Whether the issue is war or destruction, abortion or inappropriate stem cell research, the death penalty, insensitivity to the handicapped or prejudicial behavior, our response must always be the same. Life is so very sacred that it must be respected and honored, treasured and revered no matter what the surrounding circumstances might be.

The Feast of the Assumption teaches us that life is so precious that God cannot even bear it to decay away forever. God calls it back home. But until God does that, we can only treasure life for the great gift that it is.