

August 15, 2019

12:10 p.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Diocesan Day of Prayer for Peace and an End to Violence

On this beautiful Holy Day, in the midst of an otherwise busy work week, in the middle of August, and nearing the end of Summertime, we Catholics have this great privilege to come together to celebrate one of the dogmas of our Faith.

We call these occasions “holydays of obligation”, emphasizing the fact that there’s a burden of some sort to come together more than once a week; but I’d prefer to call them “Holydays of Opportunity” to join together, even briefly, to pray and to share in the Joy of Jesus’ Presence with us on this special Feast of Mary! And while most of our Holy Days celebrate some different aspect of Jesus’ profound act of bringing about our redemption and salvation, today’s Holy Day celebrates Jesus’ Mother, and the tremendous Gift that Jesus gave to her, when at the end of her earthly life, we believe that Jesus brought her Home to Heaven, body and soul, to spend eternity near Him, while interceding on His behalf for all of us, her spiritual sons and daughters.

Her Assumption into Heaven anticipates what we know awaits us at the end of our earthly lives as well. The only difference is that while our souls will enter into eternity at the time of our death, we will wait for our bodies and souls to be reunited in their glorified state until the end of all time. Jesus didn’t want His Mother to wait, and so we rejoice in this Gift that was given to Mary already, a gift that we will one day be given as well.

As Pope Francis said earlier today in Rome, *“Mary, who isone of us, has reached eternity in body and soul. That is why we invoke her as ‘the Gate of Heaven’. There (at the Gate) she awaits us as a mother waits for her children to come home.”*

Until then, we continue here in this world, making our way along our journey of faith, doing the best we can to follow Jesus in our lives, and to pursue our common vocation that we all share thru our Baptism, to be God’s holy people. This journey of faith in this world is referred to, in the prayer that many of us know off by heart, the “Hail Holy Queen”: “to Thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping, in the vale of tears”.

There's no doubt that there are many reasons for "mourning and weeping" in each of our lives, as well, we hope, many reasons also for "proclaiming" and "rejoicing" as we just heard our Blessed Mother do in the *Magnificat* which was our Gospel Reading today: "*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*".

As you know, I have asked all our parishes to observe today, in the midst of this beautiful Holy Day honoring our Blessed Mother, as a "Day of Prayer for Peace and an End to Violence", in light of the great "mourning" and "weeping" that we have done as a nation over these last couple weeks. Three different "mass shootings" within days, in Gilroy (California), El Paso, and Dayton, wreaked death and destruction, taking the lives of 34 innocent people in those 3 places, injuring an unknown number of others, and forever changing the lives of entire communities. And these "mass shootings" are happening with more and more frequency, and the vast majority seems to be motivated by pure hatred, the awful sin of racism, and a complete disregard for the value and dignity of human life.

The description in the prayer "Hail Holy Queen" seems more and more appropriate as we mourn and sigh and weep for these innocent lives, and for the destructive effects of sin we are witnessing.

Having a "Day of Prayer" is by no means a solution. It's only an attempt to refocus our selves on who we are. We are human beings who have been given a gift of life, for which we are accountable to God as to how we use, or abuse, that gift.

When these tragedies take place, I'm sure all of us feel helpless, and wonder "What can I do?". To say that we all send our "thoughts and prayers" to those who are suffering, or even to say that we will come together and "pray for peace" and "pray for an end to violence" seems insufficient. Do we somehow expect God to directly intervene and stop the madness? Or, do you think, that God is praying that we will find the will to end the madness ourselves? I think it's the latter.

God has already intervened when He sent His only-begotten Son, born of our Blessed Mother, to BE God with us: fully God; fully Human, in the Person of Jesus Christ. And His Blessed Mother, a human being like us except that she was conceived without the stain/effects of Original Sin, not only gave Birth to Jesus, and raised Him, along with Joseph, in a loving, faith-filled Home, but she also became His first and most faithful Disciple. She walked that "vale of tears",

especially as she saw what Sin did to Jesus along the Way of the Cross and on Calvary. She watched the evil of human violence and unspeakable torture poured out on Jesus. She “mourned” and “wept” for the effects of sin taking place in front of her eyes to her completely innocent and purely Loving Son, Who willingly endured this ignominy for the sake of the salvation of the world.

Mary knows our human pains, and Mary hears our “mourning and weeping”. So, today, please cry out to her, in this Mass, but also in your extra prayers today, and every day, asking for her intercession to help us to change our hearts.

We can send our “thoughts and prayers”, but we need to do more. We can’t change the world, but we can change ourselves. I think it begins, once again, with Mary’s example. She allowed her “soul to proclaim the greatness of the Lord”, and she chose to “let her spirit rejoice in God her Savior”.

Those are choices that we can make as well. Rather than just focusing on our own selves, our own needs and desires, our own plans, we need to open ourselves to what God’s plans for us are.

We need to choose to live in God’s ways, even when they are difficult and it requires sacrifice on our part to do so.

We need to pray for God’s graces, not necessarily to change the world, but to soften our hearts, to change our minds, to open our wills to be in conformity with God’s will, rather than thinking God should follow my will.

We need to treat one another with respect; we need to disavow ourselves of any harsh words or insulting discourse with our personal interactions, or in social media exchanges.

When we begin to do that, perhaps we can focus less on the “vale of tears” and more on the Heaven that awaits us all, as we celebrate our Blessed Mother’s Assumption into Heaven today.

As Mother St. Teresa of Calcutta once said so well: *“When we encounter pain and suffering in the world, our hearts are moved with compassion. We are frustrated when we can not heal all the wounds. We may be tempted to give up and do nothing. But everybody can do something. WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAN!”*

Please join me in the 2nd half of the Hail Mary: *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*