

DEFINING THE DOGMA OF THE ASSUMPTION

Munificentissimus Deus

Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII issued November 1, 1950

1. The most bountiful God, who is almighty, the plan of whose providence rests upon wisdom and love, tempers, in the secret purpose of his own mind, the sorrows of peoples and of individual men by means of joys that he interposes in their lives from time to time, in such a way that, under different conditions and in different ways, all things may work together unto good for those who love him.[1]

2. Now, just like the present age, our pontificate is weighed down by ever so many cares, anxieties, and troubles, by reason of very severe calamities that have taken place and by reason of the fact that many have strayed away from truth and virtue. Nevertheless, we are greatly consoled to see that, while the Catholic faith is being professed publicly and vigorously, piety toward the Virgin Mother of God is flourishing and daily growing more fervent, and that almost everywhere on earth it is showing indications of a better and holier life. Thus, while the Blessed Virgin is fulfilling in the most affectionate manner her maternal duties on behalf of those redeemed by the blood of Christ, the minds and the hearts of her children are being vigorously aroused to a more assiduous consideration of her prerogatives.

3. Actually God, who from all eternity regards Mary with a most favorable and unique affection, has "when the fullness of time came"[2] put the plan of his providence into effect in such a way that all the privileges and prerogatives he had granted to her in his sovereign generosity were to shine forth in her in a kind of perfect harmony. And, although the Church has always recognized this supreme generosity and the perfect harmony of graces and has daily studied them more and more throughout the course of the centuries, still it is in our own age that the privilege of the bodily Assumption into heaven of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, has certainly shone forth more clearly.

4. That privilege has shone forth in new radiance since our predecessor of immortal memory, Pius IX, solemnly proclaimed the dogma of the loving Mother of God's Immaculate Conception. These two privileges are most closely bound to one another. Christ overcame sin and death by his own death, and one who through Baptism has been born again in a supernatural way has conquered sin and death through the same Christ. Yet, according to the general rule, God does not will to grant to the just the full effect of the victory over death until the end of time has come. And so it is that the bodies of even the just are corrupted after death, and only on the last day will they be joined, each to its own glorious soul.

5. Now God has willed that the Blessed Virgin Mary should be exempted from this general rule. She, by an entirely unique privilege, completely overcame sin by her Immaculate Conception,

and as a result she was not subject to the law of remaining in the corruption of the grave, and she did not have to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body.

6. Thus, when it was solemnly proclaimed that Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, was from the very beginning free from the taint of original sin, the minds of the faithful were filled with a stronger hope that the day might soon come when the dogma of the Virgin Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven would also be defined by the Church's supreme teaching authority.

7. Actually it was seen that not only individual Catholics, but also those who could speak for nations or ecclesiastical provinces, and even a considerable number of the Fathers of the Vatican Council, urgently petitioned the Apostolic See to this effect.

8. During the course of time such postulations and petitions did not decrease but rather grew continually in number and in urgency. In this cause there were pious crusades of prayer. Many outstanding theologians eagerly and zealously carried out investigations on this subject either privately or in public ecclesiastical institutions and in other schools where the sacred disciplines are taught. Marian Congresses, both national and international in scope, have been held in many parts of the Catholic world. These studies and investigations have brought out into even clearer light the fact that the dogma of the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven is contained in the deposit of Christian faith entrusted to the Church. They have resulted in many more petitions, begging and urging the Apostolic See that this truth be solemnly defined.

9. In this pious striving, the faithful have been associated in a wonderful way with their own holy bishops, who have sent petitions of this kind, truly remarkable in number, to this See of the Blessed Peter. Consequently, when we were elevated to the throne of the supreme pontificate, petitions of this sort had already been addressed by the thousands from every part of the world and from every class of people, from our beloved sons the Cardinals of the Sacred College, from our venerable brethren, archbishops and bishops, from dioceses and from parishes.

10. Consequently, while we sent up earnest prayers to God that he might grant to our mind the light of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to make a decision on this most serious subject, we issued special orders in which we commanded that, by corporate effort, more advanced inquiries into this matter should be begun and that, in the meantime, all the petitions about the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven which had been sent to this Apostolic See from the time of Pius IX, our predecessor of happy memory, down to our own days should be gathered together and carefully evaluated.[3]

11. And, since we were dealing with a matter of such great moment and of such importance, we considered it opportune to ask all our venerable brethren in the episcopate directly and authoritatively that each of them should make known to us his mind in a formal statement. Hence, on May 1, 1946, we gave them our letter "*Deiparae Virginis Mariae*," a letter in which these words are contained: "Do you, venerable brethren, in your outstanding wisdom and prudence, judge that the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin can be proposed and defined as a dogma of faith? Do you, with your clergy and people, desire it?"

12. But those whom "the Holy Spirit has placed as bishops to rule the Church of God"[4] gave an almost unanimous affirmative response to both these questions. This "outstanding agreement of the Catholic prelates and the faithful,"[5] affirming that the bodily Assumption of God's Mother into heaven can be defined as a dogma of faith, since it shows us the concordant teaching of the Church's ordinary doctrinal authority and the concordant faith of the Christian people which the same doctrinal authority sustains and directs, thus by itself and in an entirely certain and infallible way, manifests this privilege as a truth revealed by God and contained in that divine deposit which Christ has delivered to his Spouse to be guarded faithfully and to be taught infallibly.[6] Certainly this teaching authority of the Church, not by any merely human effort but under the protection of the Spirit of Truth,[7] and therefore absolutely without error, carries out the commission entrusted to it, that of preserving the revealed truths pure and entire throughout every age, in such a way that it presents them undefiled, adding nothing to them and taking nothing away from them. For, as the Vatican Council teaches, "the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter in such a way that, by his revelation, they might manifest new doctrine, but so that, by his assistance, they might guard as sacred and might faithfully propose the revelation delivered through the apostles, or the deposit of faith." [8] Thus, from the universal agreement of the Church's ordinary teaching authority we have a certain and firm proof, demonstrating that the Blessed Virgin Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven- which surely no faculty of the human mind could know by its own natural powers, as far as the heavenly glorification of the virginal body of the loving Mother of God is concerned-is a truth that has been revealed by God and consequently something that must be firmly and faithfully believed by all children of the Church. For, as the Vatican Council asserts, "all those things are to be believed by divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the written Word of God or in Tradition, and which are proposed by the Church, either in solemn judgment or in its ordinary and universal teaching office, as divinely revealed truths which must be believed." [9]

13. Various testimonies, indications and signs of this common belief of the Church are evident from remote times down through the course of the centuries; and this same belief becomes more clearly manifest from day to day.

14. Christ's faithful, through the teaching and the leadership of their pastors, have learned from the sacred books that the Virgin Mary, throughout the course of her earthly pilgrimage, led a life troubled by cares, hardships, and sorrows, and that, moreover, what the holy old man Simeon had foretold actually came to pass, that is, that a terribly sharp sword pierced her heart as she stood under the cross of her divine Son, our Redeemer. In the same way, it was not difficult for them to admit that the great Mother of God, like her only begotten Son, had actually passed from this life. But this in no way prevented them from believing and from professing openly that her sacred body had never been subject to the corruption of the tomb, and that the august tabernacle of the Divine Word had never been reduced to dust and ashes. Actually, enlightened by divine grace and moved by affection for her, God's Mother and our own dearest Mother, they have contemplated in an ever clearer light the wonderful harmony and order of those privileges which the most provident God has lavished upon this loving associate of our Redeemer, privileges which reach such an exalted plane that, except for her, nothing created by God other than the human nature of Jesus Christ has ever reached this level.

15. The innumerable temples which have been dedicated to the Virgin Mary assumed into heaven clearly attest this faith. So do those sacred images, exposed therein for the veneration of the faithful, which bring this unique triumph of the Blessed Virgin before the eyes of all men. Moreover, cities, dioceses, and individual regions have been placed under the special patronage and guardianship of the Virgin Mother of God assumed into heaven. In the same way, religious institutes, with the approval of the Church, have been founded and have taken their name from this privilege. Nor can we pass over in silence the fact that in the Rosary of Mary, the recitation of which this Apostolic See so urgently recommends, there is one mystery proposed for pious meditation which, as all know, deals with the Blessed Virgin's Assumption into heaven.

16. This belief of the sacred pastors and of Christ's faithful is universally manifested still more splendidly by the fact that, since ancient times, there have been both in the East and in the West solemn liturgical offices commemorating this privilege. The holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church have never failed to draw enlightenment from this fact since, as everyone knows, the sacred liturgy, "because it is the profession, subject to the supreme teaching authority within the Church, of heavenly truths, can supply proofs and testimonies of no small value for deciding a particular point of Christian doctrine." [10]

17. In the liturgical books which deal with the feast either of the dormition or of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin there are expressions that agree in testifying that, when the Virgin Mother of God passed from this earthly exile to heaven, what happened to her sacred body was, by the decree of divine Providence, in keeping with the dignity of the Mother of the Word Incarnate, and with the other privileges she had been accorded. Thus, to cite an illustrious example, this is set forth in that sacramentary which Adrian I, our predecessor of immortal memory, sent to the Emperor Charlemagne. These words are found in this volume: "Venerable to us, O Lord, is the festivity of this day on which the holy Mother of God suffered temporal death, but still could not be kept down by the bonds of death, who has begotten your Son our Lord incarnate from herself." [11]

18. What is here indicated in that sobriety characteristic of the Roman liturgy is presented more clearly and completely in other ancient liturgical books. To take one as an example, the Gallican sacramentary designates this privilege of Mary's as "an ineffable mystery all the more worthy of praise as the Virgin's Assumption is something unique among men." And, in the Byzantine liturgy, not only is the Virgin Mary's bodily Assumption connected time and time again with the dignity of the Mother of God, but also with the other privileges, and in particular with the virginal motherhood granted her by a singular decree of God's Providence. "God, the King of the universe, has granted you favors that surpass nature. As he kept you a virgin in childbirth, thus he has kept your body incorrupt in the tomb and has glorified it by his divine act of transferring it from the tomb." [12]

19. The fact that the Apostolic See, which has inherited the function entrusted to the Prince of the Apostles, the function of confirming the brethren in the faith, [13] has by its own authority, made the celebration of this feast ever more solemn, has certainly and effectively moved the attentive minds of the faithful to appreciate always more completely the magnitude of the mystery it commemorates. So it was that the Feast of the Assumption was elevated from the rank which it had occupied from the beginning among the other Marian feasts to be classed among the

more solemn celebrations of the entire liturgical cycle. And, when our predecessor St. Sergius I prescribed what is known as the litany, or the stationary procession, to be held on four Marian feasts, he specified together the Feasts of the Nativity, the Annunciation, the Purification, and the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.[14] Again, St. Leo IV saw to it that the feast, which was already being celebrated under the title of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother of God, should be observed in even a more solemn way when he ordered a vigil to be held on the day before it and prescribed prayers to be recited after it until the octave day. When this had been done, he decided to take part himself in the celebration, in the midst of a great multitude of the faithful.[15] Moreover, the fact that a holy fast had been ordered from ancient times for the day prior to the feast is made very evident by what our predecessor St. Nicholas I testifies in treating of the principal fasts which "the Holy Roman Church has observed for a long time, and still observes." [16]

20. However, since the liturgy of the Church does not engender the Catholic faith, but rather springs from it, in such a way that the practices of the sacred worship proceed from the faith as the fruit comes from the tree, it follows that the holy Fathers and the great Doctors, in the homilies and sermons they gave the people on this feast day, did not draw their teaching from the feast itself as from a primary source, but rather they spoke of this doctrine as something already known and accepted by Christ's faithful. They presented it more clearly. They offered more profound explanations of its meaning and nature, bringing out into sharper light the fact that this feast shows, not only that the dead body of the Blessed Virgin Mary remained incorrupt, but that she gained a triumph out of death, her heavenly glorification after the example of her only begotten Son, Jesus Christ-truths that the liturgical books had frequently touched upon concisely and briefly.

21. Thus St. John Damascene, an outstanding herald of this traditional truth, spoke out with powerful eloquence when he compared the bodily Assumption of the loving Mother of God with her other prerogatives and privileges. "It was fitting that she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. It was fitting that she, who had carried the Creator as a child at her breast, should dwell in the divine tabernacles. It was fitting that the spouse, whom the Father had taken to himself, should live in the divine mansions. It was fitting that she, who had seen her Son upon the cross and who had thereby received into her heart the sword of sorrow which she had escaped in the act of giving birth to him, should look upon him as he sits with the Father. It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son, and that she should be honored by every creature as the Mother and as the handmaid of God." [17]

22. These words of St. John Damascene agree perfectly with what others have taught on this same subject. Statements no less clear and accurate are to be found in sermons delivered by Fathers of an earlier time or of the same period, particularly on the occasion of this feast. And so, to cite some other examples, St. Germanus of Constantinople considered the fact that the body of Mary, the virgin Mother of God, was incorrupt and had been taken up into heaven to be in keeping, not only with her divine motherhood, but also with the special holiness of her virginal body. "You are she who, as it is written, appears in beauty, and your virginal body is all holy, all chaste, entirely the dwelling place of God, so that it is henceforth completely exempt from dissolution into dust. Though still human, it is changed into the heavenly life of incorruptibility,

truly living and glorious, undamaged and sharing in perfect life." [18] And another very ancient writer asserts: "As the most glorious Mother of Christ, our Savior and God and the giver of life and immortality, has been endowed with life by him, she has received an eternal incorruptibility of the body together with him who has raised her up from the tomb and has taken her up to himself in a way known only to him." [19]

23. When this liturgical feast was being celebrated ever more widely and with ever increasing devotion and piety, the bishops of the Church and its preachers in continually greater numbers considered it their duty openly and clearly to explain the mystery that the feast commemorates, and to explain how it is intimately connected with the other revealed truths.

24. Among the scholastic theologians there have not been lacking those who, wishing to inquire more profoundly into divinely revealed truths and desirous of showing the harmony that exists between what is termed the theological demonstration and the Catholic faith, have always considered it worthy of note that this privilege of the Virgin Mary's Assumption is in wonderful accord with those divine truths given us in Holy Scripture.

25. When they go on to explain this point, they adduce various proofs to throw light on this privilege of Mary. As the first element of these demonstrations, they insist upon the fact that, out of filial love for his mother, Jesus Christ has willed that she be assumed into heaven. They base the strength of their proofs on the incomparable dignity of her divine motherhood and of all those prerogatives which follow from it. These include her exalted holiness, entirely surpassing the sanctity of all men and of the angels, the intimate union of Mary with her Son, and the affection of preeminent love which the Son has for his most worthy Mother.

26. Often there are theologians and preachers who, following in the footsteps of the holy Fathers, [20] have been rather free in their use of events and expressions taken from Sacred Scripture to explain their belief in the Assumption. Thus, to mention only a few of the texts rather frequently cited in this fashion, some have employed the words of the psalmist: "Arise, O Lord, into your resting place: you and the ark, which you have sanctified" [21]; and have looked upon the Ark of the Covenant, built of incorruptible wood and placed in the Lord's temple, as a type of the most pure body of the Virgin Mary, preserved and exempt from all the corruption of the tomb and raised up to such glory in heaven. Treating of this subject, they also describe her as the Queen entering triumphantly into the royal halls of heaven and sitting at the right hand of the divine Redeemer. [22] Likewise they mention the Spouse of the Canticles "that goes up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh and frankincense" to be crowned. [23] These are proposed as depicting that heavenly Queen and heavenly Spouse who has been lifted up to the courts of heaven with the divine Bridegroom.

27. Moreover, the scholastic Doctors have recognized the Assumption of the Virgin Mother of God as something signified, not only in various figures of the Old Testament, but also in that woman clothed with the sun whom John the Apostle contemplated on the Island of Patmos. [24] Similarly they have given special attention to these words of the New Testament: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women," [25] since they saw, in the mystery of the Assumption, the fulfillment of that most perfect grace granted to the Blessed Virgin and the special blessing that countered the curse of Eve.

28. Thus, during the earliest period of scholastic theology, that most pious man, Amadeus, Bishop of Lausarne, held that the Virgin Mary's flesh had remained incorrupt-for it is wrong to believe that her body has seen corruption-because it was really united again to her soul and, together with it, crowned with great glory in the heavenly courts. "For she was full of grace and blessed among women. She alone merited to conceive the true God of true God, whom as a virgin, she brought forth, to whom as a virgin she gave milk, fondling him in her lap, and in all things she waited upon him with loving care." [26]

29. Among the holy writers who at that time employed statements and various images and analogies of Sacred Scripture to illustrate and to confirm the doctrine of the Assumption, which was piously believed, the Evangelical Doctor, St. Anthony of Padua, holds a special place. On the feast day of the Assumption, while explaining the prophet's words: "I will glorify the place of my feet," [27] he stated it as certain that the divine Redeemer had bedecked with supreme glory his most beloved Mother from whom he had received human flesh. He asserts that "you have here a clear statement that the Blessed Virgin has been assumed in her body, where was the place of the Lord's feet. Hence it is that the holy Psalmist writes: 'Arise, O Lord, into your resting place: you and the ark which you have sanctified.'" And he asserts that, just as Jesus Christ has risen from the death over which he triumphed and has ascended to the right hand of the Father, so likewise the ark of his sanctification "has risen up, since on this day the Virgin Mother has been taken up to her heavenly dwelling." [28]

30. When, during the Middle Ages, scholastic theology was especially flourishing, St. Albert the Great who, to establish this teaching, had gathered together many proofs from Sacred Scripture, from the statements of older writers, and finally from the liturgy and from what is known as theological reasoning, concluded in this way: "From these proofs and authorities and from many others, it is manifest that the most blessed Mother of God has been assumed above the choirs of angels. And this we believe in every way to be true." [29] And, in a sermon which he delivered on the sacred day of the Blessed Virgin Mary's annunciation, explained the words "Hail, full of grace"-words used by the angel who addressed her-the Universal Doctor, comparing the Blessed Virgin with Eve, stated clearly and incisively that she was exempted from the fourfold curse that had been laid upon Eve. [30]

31. Following the footsteps of his distinguished teacher, the Angelic Doctor, despite the fact that he never dealt directly with this question, nevertheless, whenever he touched upon it, always held together with the Catholic Church, that Mary's body had been assumed into heaven along with her soul. [31]

32. Along with many others, the Seraphic Doctor held the same views. He considered it as entirely certain that, as God had preserved the most holy Virgin Mary from the violation of her virginal purity and integrity in conceiving and in childbirth, he would never have permitted her body to have been resolved into dust and ashes. [32] Explaining these words of Sacred Scripture: "Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?" [33] and applying them in a kind of accommodated sense to the Blessed Virgin, he reasons thus: "From this we can see that she is there bodily...her blessedness would not have been complete unless she were there as a person. The soul is not a person, but the soul, joined to

the body, is a person. It is manifest that she is there in soul and in body. Otherwise she would not possess her complete beatitude.[34]

33. In the fifteenth century, during a later period of scholastic theology, St. Bernardine of Siena collected and diligently evaluated all that the medieval theologians had said and taught on this question. He was not content with setting down the principal considerations which these writers of an earlier day had already expressed, but he added others of his own. The likeness between God's Mother and her divine Son, in the way of the nobility and dignity of body and of soul—a likeness that forbids us to think of the heavenly Queen as being separated from the heavenly King makes it entirely imperative that Mary "should be only where Christ is." [35] Moreover, it is reasonable and fitting that not only the soul and body of a man, but also the soul and body of a woman should have obtained heavenly glory. Finally, since the Church has never looked for the bodily relics of the Blessed Virgin nor proposed them for the veneration of the people, we have a proof on the order of a sensible experience. [36]

34. The above-mentioned teachings of the holy Fathers and of the Doctors have been in common use during more recent times. Gathering together the testimonies of the Christians of earlier days, St. Robert Bellarmine exclaimed: "And who, I ask, could believe that the ark of holiness, the dwelling place of the Word of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, could be reduced to ruin? My soul is filled with horror at the thought that this virginal flesh which had begotten God, had brought him into the world, had nourished and carried him, could have been turned into ashes or given over to be food for worms." [37]

35. In like manner St. Francis of Sales, after asserting that it is wrong to doubt that Jesus Christ has himself observed, in the most perfect way, the divine commandment by which children are ordered to honor their parents, asks this question: "What son would not bring his mother back to life and would not bring her into paradise after her death if he could?" [38] And St. Alphonsus writes that "Jesus did not wish to have the body of Mary corrupted after death, since it would have redounded to his own dishonor to have her virginal flesh, from which he himself had assumed flesh, reduced to dust." [39]

36. Once the mystery which is commemorated in this feast had been placed in its proper light, there were not lacking teachers who, instead of dealing with the theological reasonings that show why it is fitting and right to believe the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven, chose to focus their mind and attention on the faith of the Church itself, which is the Mystical Body of Christ without stain or wrinkle [40] and is called by the Apostle "the pillar and ground of truth." [41] Relying on this common faith, they considered the teaching opposed to the doctrine of our Lady's Assumption as temerarious, if not heretical. Thus, like not a few others, St. Peter Canisius, after he had declared that the very word "assumption" signifies the glorification, not only of the soul but also of the body, and that the Church has venerated and has solemnly celebrated this mystery of Mary's Assumption for many centuries, adds these words of warning: "This teaching has already been accepted for some centuries, it has been held as certain in the minds of the pious people, and it has been taught to the entire Church in such a way that those who deny that Mary's body has been assumed into heaven are not to be listened to patiently but are everywhere to be denounced as over-contentious or rash men, and as imbued with a spirit that is heretical rather than Catholic." [42]

37. At the same time the great Suarez was professing in the field of mariology the norm that "keeping in mind the standards of propriety, and when there is no contradiction or repugnance on the part of Scripture, the mysteries of grace which God has wrought in the Virgin must be measured, not by the ordinary laws, but by the divine omnipotence." [43] Supported by the common faith of the entire Church on the subject of the mystery of the Assumption, he could conclude that this mystery was to be believed with the same firmness of assent as that given to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. Thus he already held that such truths could be defined.

38. All these proofs and considerations of the holy Fathers and the theologians are based upon the Sacred Writings as their ultimate foundation. These set the loving Mother of God as it were before our very eyes as most intimately joined to her divine Son and as always sharing his lot. Consequently it seems impossible to think of her, the one who conceived Christ, brought him forth, nursed him with her milk, held him in her arms, and clasped him to her breast, as being apart from him in body, even though not in soul, after this earthly life. Since our Redeemer is the Son of Mary, he could not do otherwise, as the perfect observer of God's law, than to honor, not only his eternal Father, but also his most beloved Mother. And, since it was within his power to grant her this great honor, to preserve her from the corruption of the tomb, we must believe that he really acted in this way.

39. We must remember especially that, since the second century, the Virgin Mary has been designated by the holy Fathers as the new Eve, who, although subject to the new Adam, is most intimately associated with him in that struggle against the infernal foe which, as foretold in the protoevangelium, [44] would finally result in that most complete victory over the sin and death which are always mentioned together in the writings of the Apostle of the Gentiles. [45] Consequently, just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and the final sign of this victory, so that struggle which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her divine Son should be brought to a close by the glorification of her virginal body, for the same Apostle says: "When this mortal thing hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory." [46]

40. Hence the revered Mother of God, from all eternity joined in a hidden way with Jesus Christ in one and the same decree of predestination, [47] immaculate in her conception, a most perfect virgin in her divine motherhood, the noble associate of the divine Redeemer who has won a complete triumph over sin and its consequences, finally obtained, as the supreme culmination of her privileges, that she should be preserved free from the corruption of the tomb and that, like her own Son, having overcome death, she might be taken up body and soul to the glory of heaven where, as Queen, she sits in splendor at the right hand of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages. [48]

41. Since the universal Church, within which dwells the Spirit of Truth who infallibly directs it toward an ever more perfect knowledge of the revealed truths, has expressed its own belief many times over the course of the centuries, and since the bishops of the entire world are almost unanimously petitioning that the truth of the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven should be defined as a dogma of divine and Catholic faith—this truth which is based on the Sacred Writings, which is thoroughly rooted in the minds of the faithful, which has been

approved in ecclesiastical worship from the most remote times, which is completely in harmony with the other revealed truths, and which has been expounded and explained magnificently in the work, the science, and the wisdom of the theologians—we believe that the moment appointed in the plan of divine providence for the solemn proclamation of this outstanding privilege of the Virgin Mary has already arrived.

42. We, who have placed our pontificate under the special patronage of the most holy Virgin, to whom we have had recourse so often in times of grave trouble, we who have consecrated the entire human race to her Immaculate Heart in public ceremonies, and who have time and time again experienced her powerful protection, are confident that this solemn proclamation and definition of the Assumption will contribute in no small way to the advantage of human society, since it redounds to the glory of the Most Blessed Trinity, to which the Blessed Mother of God is bound by such singular bonds. It is to be hoped that all the faithful will be stirred up to a stronger piety toward their heavenly Mother, and that the souls of all those who glory in the Christian name may be moved by the desire of sharing in the unity of Jesus Christ's Mystical Body and of increasing their love for her who shows her motherly heart to all the members of this august body. And so we may hope that those who meditate upon the glorious example Mary offers us may be more and more convinced of the value of a human life entirely devoted to carrying out the heavenly Father's will and to bringing good to others. Thus, while the illusory teachings of materialism and the corruption of morals that follows from these teachings threaten to extinguish the light of virtue and to ruin the lives of men by exciting discord among them, in this magnificent way all may see clearly to what a lofty goal our bodies and souls are destined. Finally it is our hope that belief in Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven will make our belief in our own resurrection stronger and render it more effective.

43. We rejoice greatly that this solemn event falls, according to the design of God's providence, during this Holy Year, so that we are able, while the great Jubilee is being observed, to adorn the brow of God's Virgin Mother with this brilliant gem, and to leave a monument more enduring than bronze of our own most fervent love for the Mother of God.

44. For which reason, after we have poured forth prayers of supplication again and again to God, and have invoked the light of the Spirit of Truth, for the glory of Almighty God who has lavished his special affection upon the Virgin Mary, for the honor of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages and the Victor over sin and death, for the increase of the glory of that same august Mother, and for the joy and exultation of the entire Church; by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

45. Hence if anyone, which God forbid, should dare willfully to deny or to call into doubt that which we have defined, let him know that he has fallen away completely from the divine and Catholic Faith.

46. In order that this, our definition of the bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven may be brought to the attention of the universal Church, we desire that this, our Apostolic Letter,

should stand for perpetual remembrance, commanding that written copies of it, or even printed copies, signed by the hand of any public notary and bearing the seal of a person constituted in ecclesiastical dignity, should be accorded by all men the same reception they would give to this present letter, were it tendered or shown.

47. It is forbidden to any man to change this, our declaration, pronouncement, and definition or, by rash attempt, to oppose and counter it. If any man should presume to make such an attempt, let him know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

48. Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, in the year of the great Jubilee, 1950, on the first day of the month of November, on the Feast of All Saints, in the twelfth year of our pontificate.

I, PIUS, Bishop of the Catholic Church, have signed, so defining.

ENDNOTES

1. Rom 8:28.

- 2. Gal 4:4.
- 3. Cf. Hentrich-Von Moos, *Petitiones de Assumptione Corporea B. Virginis Mariae in Caelum Definienda ad S. Sedem Delatae*, 2 volumes (Vatican Polyglot Press, 1942).
- 4. Acts 20:28.
- 5. The Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, in the *Acta Pii IX*, pars 1, Vol. 1, p. 615.
- 6. The Vatican Council, Constitution *Dei filius*, c. 4.
- 7. Jn 14:26.
- 8. Vatican Council, Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, c. 4.
- 9. *Ibid.*, *Dei Filius*, c. 3.
- 10. The encyclical *Mediator Dei* (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, XXXIX, 541).
- 11. *Sacramentarium Gregorianum*.
- 12. *Menaei Totius Anni*.
- 13. Lk 22:32.
- 14. *Liber Pontificalis*.
- 15. *Ibid.*
- 16. *Responsa Nicolai Papae I ad Consulta Bulgarorum*.
- 17. St. John Damascene, *Encomium in Dormitionem Dei Genetricis Semperque Virginis Mariae*, *Hom. II*, n. 14; cf. also *ibid*, n. 3.
- 18. St. Germanus of Constantinople, *In Sanctae Dei Genetricis Dormitionem*, Sermo I.
- 19. The *Encomium in Dormitionem Sanctissimae Dominae Nostrate Deiparae Semperque Virginis Mariae*, attributed to St. Modestus of Jerusalem, n. 14.
- 20. Cf. St. John Damascene, *op. cit.*, *Hom. II*, n. 11; and also the *Encomium* attributed to St. Modestus.
- 21. Ps 131:8.

- 22. Ps 44:10-14ff.
- 23. Song 3:6; cf. also 4:8; 6:9.
- 24. Rv 12:1ff.
- 25. Lk 1:28.
- 26. Amadeus of Lausanne, *De Beatae Virginis Obitu, Assumptione in Caelum Exaltatione ad Filii Dexteram*.
- 27. Is 61:13.
- 28. St. Anthony of Padua, *Sermones Dominicales et in Solemnitatibus, In Assumptione S. Mariae Virginis Sermo*.
- 29. St. Albert the Great, *Mariale*, q. 132.
- 30. St. Albert the Great, *Sermones de Sanctis, Sermo XV in Annuntiatione B. Mariae*; cf. also *Mariale*, q. 132.
- 31. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol., Illa*; q. 27, a. 1; q. 83, a. 5, ad 8; *Expositio Salutationis Angelicae; In Symb. Apostolorum Expositio*, a. S; *In IV Sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 3, sol. 3; d. 43, q. 1, a. 3, sol. 1, 2.
- 32. St. Bonaventure, *De Nativitate B. Mariae Virginis, Sermo V*.
- 33. Song 8:5.
- 34. St. Bonaventure, *De Assumptione B. Mariae Virginis, Sermo I*.
- 35. St. Bernardine of Siena, *In Assumptione B. Mariae Virginis, Sermo 11*.
- 36. *Ibid.*
- 37. St. Robert Bellarmine, *Conciones Habitaee Lovanii*, n. 40, *De Assumption B. Mariae Virginis*.
- 38. *Oeuvres de St. Francois De Sales*, sermon for the Feast of the Assumption.
- 39. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*, Part 2, d. 1.
- 40. Eph 5:27.
- 41. I Tm 3:15.
- 42. St. Peter Canisius, *De Maria Virgine*.
- 43. Suarez, *In Tertiam Partem D. Thomae*, q. 27, a. 2, disp. 3, sec. 5, n. 31.
- 44. Gn 3:15.
- 45. Rm 5-6; I Cor. 15:21-26, 54-57.
- 46. I Cor 15:54.
- 47. The Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, *loc. cit.*, p. 599.
- 48. I Tm 1:17.