

Our Lady of the Assumption



The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a dogma defined by the Church. The definition was made by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950. Though defined in recent times, belief in the Assumption existed in the Church from a very early era. Let us remind ourselves that dogmatic definition is the formal proclamation as an article of faith of an already existing belief. The last mention of Our Lady in the New Testament is her presence with the apostles who were at prayer in the upper room (cenacle) at Jerusalem after Christ's ascension. "All these joined in continuous prayer together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1: 14). There is nothing in the New Testament about her later life. It well suited her humility (Luke 1:48) to fade away after her God-given task had been accomplished. We have to turn to tradition for information about her last days.

In the first place, there is no tradition regarding Mary's burial place. The early Christians were much concerned about the tombs of martyrs and other saintly men and women. Their remains were objects of veneration. If that is how the tombs of saints were regarded, how much more concern would there be about the body of the mother of Christ and the place where it was interred? Her grave would have in fact been frequently visited by the early Christians and would have become a great shrine in Christendom. But tradition has no record of a tomb for the Blessed Virgin. We have to infer from this that her body did not remain in the tomb, even if it had been buried. Devotion to Our Lady existed quite early in the Church. The concept of Mother of God was formally upheld by the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). In the 5th Century the Eastern Church was already celebrating among other feasts of Our Lady, one called the Memorial of Mary on August 15, corresponding to the "birthday into heaven" of the martyrs. The feast eventually came to be known as The Dormition (falling asleep) of Our Lady. In the 7th Century Rome adopted the feast and in the following century the title Dormition was replaced by Assumption under Pope Adrian I (772-795).

The Feast of the Assumption of Mary is celebrated on August 15th.