



**SISTERS OF
MERCY**
WORLDWIDE

Today, Sisters of Mercy, through Mercy International Association, use their resources to respond to issues of global poverty demonstrated in the massive displacement of persons worldwide.

15 August: Feast of the Assumption

Is it “The Assumption of Mary into Heaven” or the “Dormition of the Theotokos”?

—The Taking of Mary to Heaven or the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God?

Did Mary come to the end of her life and then was simply taken into heaven... or did she die, like her son, and on the third day her tomb was found empty, and followers assumed that she, except for her clothes, was risen, living wholly now in what is the Age to Come?

Actually, I dare not say. — And nor does Roman doctrine, or Eastern for that matter. In fact, the Latin tradition leaves it ambiguous and Eastern traditions prefer to keep the subject resting in a liturgical arena. Whatever this feast day is really about, it has been a work in progress ever since the time of Mary.

Many Christian communities around the world celebrate this feast day in robust fashion. And, frankly, many do not. Since the Community of Mercy is very historically rooted in devotion to Mary I wondered how I might reflect upon this feast in a way that bridges a bit of this divide.

First, what does it mean that people for 2000 years have leaned toward her for inspiration, consolation, and assistance? And while her memory has been grossly sanitized... across cultures, and often patriarchally tamed beyond much connection to a Jewish woman of her time, the heart of her story remains. — She took a chance, she said “yes” to some big invitation, a mystery, an event, an encounter. She said, “Count me in!” — She was all about being part of incarnating God in our midst. No guarantees, just life lived full — desiring the hidden and revealing God who draws and pulls us toward more, and who pulls with us, as well.

That people have celebrated her, thereby raising her up, claiming and reclaiming her in their own local communities, across centuries putting flesh on her bones in their own particular ways, speaks to her significance for the ages.

Second, what does it say about how much we need archetypal icons of courageous, spirited women, women who are willing to be drawn fully by and into the Mystery, the core of life and life’s purpose? — Does she tug on some golden thread that is woven into our DNA? Her story lacks details yet embodies epoch sweeps of religious allegorical meaning that confronts our own stories and questions.

Third, what does it mean if we believe Mary died, but following in the pattern of the story of Jesus’ Ascension, she is assumed on the third day into the fullness of time, a yet to come time for us all? Eastern Christians view her story from this direction, and some Latin Christians do too. Or, that she did not die but came to the end of her life and was taken into the fullness of the heart of God? What do these different stories ask of us?— If a story is a vehicle, what do these carry for us?

Whatever the “real story” is, facts can never summarily give us truth, much less what philosophers and theologians might estimate as “Truth.” The legends of Mary over the centuries rose up from the people who had troubles and needs. Stories, legends, traditions, and theological reflections emerged

and developed because people experienced a distinct capacity in her story for compassion and mercy, as well as a kind of holy beauty in her that attracts the soul of people to something they want to reverence.

Today we have troubles and needs. — While the 19th and 20th centuries were about freedom, liberation, modern industrialization, and a slow anesthetizing of humanity to be witness to the poetry of the world, the 21st century struggles with sustainability, viability, the inter-dependent global reality of a small planet, an appreciation for those dimensions of life and culture that are not easily quantifiable or commercialized, and last but not least, to how personally and communally we can be responsible to present and future generations for how we live on this planet.

We know we can never fully name “Truth,” the kind that people of many stripes are convinced lives in us, down to our toes, and paradoxically draws us body and soul into the light that always beckons us. However, there is something of “Truth” in Mary’s story and how it has evolved that inspires people to go on, to work at unknotting messed up relationships, to tend to roses in winter, to weep with those who have no one there to weep with them, and to rise with those who have been held back, stepped on, or given up for dead.

What of her life and legend inspires you/us and helps to spur our will to overcome the obstacles that hold us back from being who we need and want to be during this fragile and dangerous era when we are all called to step up and participate in the incarnation of compassion and mercy and beauty and goodness in both simple and radical ways? What of her rising into fullness inspires us to say “count us in”?

Consider reflecting on the pictures included on the website: <https://populationspeakout.org/the-book/view-book/>

Mary-Paula Cancienne, RSM, Ph.D.

E: Mary-paulacancienrsm@msn.com

First published in *MercyNews* Issue #784, 15 August 2018. Website: www.mercyworld.org