

“Mary, our Mother” - The Assumption (2011)



My mother’s youngest sister, my Aunt Geraldine, who is only a few years older than me, tells the story of flying out from Zurich Airport after a holiday in Switzerland with my mother. The weather was awful. They were in the midst of a storm, with lightning flashing above them and thunder crashing around them. As they walked out to the plane, Geraldine said to my mother, ‘Surely it cannot be safe to take off?’ But my mother replied, ‘There’s nothing to worry about. They know what they are doing.’ And from that moment, Geraldine recalls, she felt calm and safe. Only later did she think that her sister knew no more about flying than herself. What mattered was that her big sister/second mother made her feel absolutely looked after.

A few weeks ago, a group of us from the parish went to the British Museum to see the exhibition, *Treasures of Heaven*, which explores relics and reliquaries. Throughout the two thousand year history of the Church, towns and communities have celebrated having the mortal remains of apostles and martyrs. They have valued the prayers of these saints and enjoyed the revenue from pilgrimage. But no one has ever claimed to have the bodies of what would be the two greatest attractions: Our Lord’s, because he rose from the dead nor Our Lady’s because, as we celebrate today, by the power of God at the completion of her life, Mary was taken body and soul into everlasting glory. The Assumption of Mary is God’s promise to us that we too, at the time of the General Resurrection, are destined for life in Heaven.



Twenty-three years after he had completed the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo returned to paint the Last Judgement. You could argue that it is the work of an older man, who has become all too aware of his own frailty and humanity’s. In the painting, Christ’s focus seems to be on the damned and it is easy to be more aware of their presence than the blessed rising to heaven. Immediately to Christ’s right is his mother who looks away from Him and downwards. You can’t miss Our Lady; after Christ she is the most central figure. But what is often missed is what she is looking at. Follow her gaze downwards and you come to a crouching angel on a cloud who is pulling up two souls but what is striking is how the angel is pulling them up: for his rope he is using rosary beads which one of the souls is fervently kissing. By Mary’s prayers, these two souls are being helped to Heaven.

However big and ugly we may become, however large may be our own families and however responsible may be our jobs, most of us, most of the time, feel like children wearing adults’ clothes and when we are sick or in trouble we would gladly turn to our mothers to hug us and

make it all better. Thank God for our mothers' care of us and their prayers, despite their own frailty and weakness. Like my own mother in a thunder storm, they can help us to cope. And today we honour someone we can all claim as our Mother, who was given to us by her Son from the Cross: 'This is your mother' (John 19:27). This mother, however, has been tried and tested and, unlike our own fallible mothers, can be relied upon completely. As she said of herself to her cousin Elizabeth: 'all generations will call me blessed.'

It is wonderful to be prayed for; prayer is a real help. And no one's prayers count for more than Mary's; she who was assumed into Heaven, having first been given to us as our Mother. Personally, I have increasingly found the rosary to be a wonderful help. Simple to pray when driving or waiting, I like to offer up each decade for a different person or intention, knowing that Mary intercedes for me with a mother's love. In our world of confusion and sorrow, it is good to know that our mother is where it matters: at Christ's side, loving us, speaking for us.