

## THE ASSUMPTION

### TREADING THE FOOTSTEPS OF MARY

*Hail Mary full of grace. The Lord is with you...* These words announced the beginning of a life-change for a young Hebrew girl that would impact on the rest of human history, and indeed the history of the whole world. Mary found herself in the company of God, and in that companionship was placed above every other creature in heaven and on earth.

Our Catholic tradition finds it easy to honour Mary, the Mother of Jesus and to see her as a great intercessor for all people, especially those struggling with suffering, doubt, fear, or any weakness. But this “ease” of devotion also places a huge responsibility on us, for Mary is not a woman to be taken lightly. To look up to her, to honour her, is to be immediately challenged to imitate her.

Mary, as the one who opened the door for God to enter our world in our humanity, shows us what can happen when a person gives themselves entirely to the realm of the Spirit. *The Almighty has done great things for me.* Mary recognised that her life, her very being, became an Ark, a Sacred Tent, providing a home for God as she willingly and lovingly gave herself in response to God’s word; and the *greatness* of God became wonderfully visible in her life.

Pope Francis brought Mary into his 2015 Letter to the world about the care of our common home (*Laudato Si*):

As “the Mother who cared for Jesus, she now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world.” [n241]. She does this especially as a model of perfection, attained through what we celebrate today as her Assumption into Heaven. To again quote Pope Francis, “In her glorified body, together with

the Risen Christ, part of creation has reached the fullness of its beauty.....  
Hence we can ask her to enable us to look on this world with eyes of wisdom.”

New Zealand Marist Brother and scripture scholar, Kieran Fenn, writing about Mary, the Mother of Jesus, suggests that the *secret of Mary's mysterious power may be that, by having no history of her own, she entices each generation to draw her portrait.* So from the background of our tradition and the lovely appreciation that Pope Francis offers, let us begin to paint.

Mary, woman of strength and wisdom carried a heart pierced with the lance of sorrow and disappointment, of misunderstanding and rejection.

So, anyone opening their heart to love must also expect an uncertain journey.

Her arms held Jesus at the moment of his birth and when his body was unnailed from the cross. His life and his death were hers. Then, as Jesus was abandoned by his closest friends, Mary too was let down by their cowardice and selfishness. Yet, her prayer helped heal the brokenness of the disciples and poured hope into the small community as it became the new People of God.

Our portrait of Mary takes us into her footsteps. She is one of us and is there to guide you and I as we encounter the inevitable path of suffering, *the vale of tears.* Her example will help open a deep and lasting peace in the wellspring of faith and it will be tears of joy that rise up from grateful hearts.

Her sorrows and her pain did not lessen the joy in her heart or tarnish the beauty of her humanity. Likewise, she shows how we can take whatever is troubling or hurtful to us and set it leaping for joy by using it as a means to strengthen life.

Mary can never take the place of Jesus; she leads us to his nourishing presence in the Eucharist of his Body and Blood. Her portrait for us today is completed in the offering of Jesus that enables us to serve one another and our world. Surely we can go from here confident in the knowledge that the Lord *has done great things for us* in the gift of Mary – and that, through her, we can do great things towards bringing ourselves and all creation to *the fullness* of the beauty God sees in us.

*Fr James Lyons is a priest of the Archdiocese of Wellington*