

## Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary August 15, 2010

**Readings: Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; Luke 1:39-56**

### **The Ark of the New Covenant is Not Lost**

About 30 years ago there was an action/adventure movie produced which became one of the highest grossing movies of all time. The movie I'm referring to is *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*. It's a classic. I'm sure many of you have seen it, and some have seen it more than once—I know I have. The movie is set back in 1936 and is a fictional story about how the Nazis try to find the lost Ark of the Covenant of the Old Testament. The Israelites were successful when they carried the Ark into battle with them, and the Nazis feel that it had the power to make their army invincible. Indiana Jones is sent by the US government to find the ark first so that it doesn't fall into the hands of the Nazis.

The movie is fiction, but it is based on a very important historical fact. And that is that we do not know the location of the very sacred Ark of the Covenant that the Israelites carried through the desert, and which eventually found its home in the temple in Jerusalem. We know a lot about the Ark from the Bible. We know that the Ark was a rectangular box about 4' long made of acacia wood, known for its ability to resist decay and deterioration, and then plated with gold. We know that it contained the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, the law of God. It contained manna collected in the desert, food from heaven. And it contained Aaron's staff, a symbol of the priesthood. It was carried by two poles, also made of acacia wood and plated with gold. The Ark was so sacred and powerful that once, when it was being moved and it began to tip, one of the men reached out and touched it to steady it and he was immediately stricken dead. So how could a box this special and holy and awe-inspiring vanish into thin air?

Well, there are allusions in the Bible, in the second book of Maccabees, that seem to indicate that the prophet Jeremiah hid the Ark in a mountain cave so that it would not fall into the hands of the Babylonians when Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed about 600 years before the birth of Jesus. Some followed Jeremiah up the mountain and tried to mark the way and the location, but later could not find it. Jeremiah rebuked them saying: ***"The place is to remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy."*** (2 Macc. 2:7) Jeremiah preached to the Israelites that they had broken the covenant that God had made with them through Moses. It no longer made sense for the people to possess the Ark, which symbolized God's presence in their midst, once the covenant was broken by the people's sinfulness and idol worship. This sinfulness and idol worship was the cause of their punishment and exile by God at the hands of the Babylonians.

And so, almost 600 years later, God sent His Son to make a new covenant, the covenant we celebrate when we come together for Mass. And He was born of a sinless virgin, one who had been conceived immaculately, that is without the stain of original sin. We refer to Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant. For nine months her body contained the physical presence of Jesus Christ. The Ark of the New Covenant did not contain words written on stone tablets, it contained the Word of God Himself. It did not contain manna that sustained only physical life, it contained Jesus, the Bread of eternal life. It did not contain a symbol of the priesthood, it contained the eternal High Priest of the New Covenant. Mary's body was indeed much holier than the old Ark of the Covenant.

In the Book of Revelation we hear John talk about his visions while he was in exile. In our reading this morning from that book we heard: ***“God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple.”*** At the time that John wrote this, the Temple in Jerusalem, which had been rebuilt, had once again been destroyed, this time by the Romans. And the Ark had not been seen on earth for 600 years. But John's vision was of a temple in heaven and in that temple was the Ark, not of the Old Covenant, but of the New Covenant. John continues in the very next verse: ***“A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”***

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption, the fact that Mary was assumed bodily into heaven to be with her Son. It is a fact that the Church has understood from the first centuries, but which was finally declared infallibly by Pope Pius XII in 1950. He stated: ***“Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death.”***

As I have already said, the original Ark of the Covenant was manufactured from acacia wood to prevent its deterioration. It was fitting, therefore, that the much holier Ark of the New Covenant should also not face physical decay. Early Christians marked and kept track of the burial sites of important figures in the Church, but there are no indications of Mary's burial site; there are no bones or relics preserved.

Death and decay of our bodies was never intended for any of us; it is the result of original sin. In the Garden of Eden, after the fall of Adam and Eve, God said to Adam: ***“By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return.”*** (Gen. 3:19) But Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin and so she did not return to the dust of the earth as we will when our earthly lives are over. She reigns now in heaven with her Son. There will be no raiders of the Ark of the New Covenant. She is not lost; we know exactly where she is.

And this dogma of the Assumption which the Church gives to us is very important. It points the way to our ultimate future when Jesus will come again in glory to create a new heaven and a new earth where our bodies will also be restored. We are in a time between the two comings of Christ. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, produced at the Second Vatican Council, states: ***“In the interim just as the Mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come, so too does she shine forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, as a sign of sure hope and solace to the people of God during its sojourn on earth.”*** (68)

Let today's celebration bring you hope. Let Mary be a source of solace and comfort. She is our mother who reigns with her Son, Jesus, our Brother. Rely on the Ark of the New Covenant when you face your everyday battles. Bring your needs to Mary while you are on your short journey here on earth, and she will lovingly intercede on your behalf with her Son.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**