

“So will the king desire your beauty.”

Ps 44:12

The month of August is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, but perhaps we sometimes overlook just what we mean by this title of Our Lady. If we look at what *God* means by this title, we might understand today's feast of the Assumption better. And to find out what God means, we can do no better than to look at the words from today's Responsorial Psalm (Gradual) where it says: 'So will the king desire your beauty.'

In the beginning, what God created was good. Indeed, following the creation of the first two human beings, the Book of Genesis tells us that God looked upon what He had created and found it '*very good*.' God, who is not just beautiful but is Beauty itself, pours His beauty into everything and everyone He creates. Every creature reflects something of His beauty. The stain of Adam's sin mars that beauty, but that beauty is restored by the grace received in the Sacrament of Baptism. Our own sins disfigure the beauty of our souls over and over again as we make our way through life, and it is only through the grace we receive in the Sacrament of Confession that that beauty is restored over and over again.

We know that Our Blessed Lady was preserved from the stain of original sin by God's grace such that the beauty of her soul was never tainted, a fact we celebrate each year on the feast of her Immaculate Conception in December. It is also true that God had looked upon His handmaid and knew in advance how her soul would blossom even more under the influence of His grace as she grew to womanhood. Seeing how this would be, He chose her, before the creation began, for a most particular role. Did the fact that God saw how Mary would blossom under the influence of His grace *cause* her to blossom and remain free from sin? Well, it is worth repeating that just because God knows something in advance does not

take away someone's free will. Our Lady, like the rest of us, could choose whether or not to do God's will. But seeing in advance just how docile to His will she would be, God, from the moment of her conception, granted her further gifts to enable her to fulfill her own childhood consecration of herself to His will. Granted, it's a little bit like the chicken and egg: which came first? Did God know she would blossom in the way that she did, and so He preserved her free from sin from the start? Or did He preserve her free from sin and, as a result, she blossomed in the way that she did? We can never fully understand the relationship between the action of God's grace in Our Lady's soul on the one hand and her response to that grace on the other. But what we *do* know, is that God looked upon the unutterable beauty of her soul, recognized in her someone worthy to bear His only begotten Son, and chose her before the foundation of the world to bring forth the Incarnate Saviour of the world.

But what was it exactly that God saw when He looked into her soul? Chiefly, He saw integrity: Our Blessed Mother is a woman of integrity. That is, in body and soul, she matches the image that God had of her before ever He created her. In other words, she became what God created her to be; she lived as God called her to live; and, as it says in the Song of Songs, she, in turn, sought Him whom her soul loved, and she found Him (Song 3:1). She in whom the stain of sin is not to be found is, after her Beloved Son, the perfect model of what all human beings were meant to be. In her, there is no trace of the disorder between body and soul which has been brought about in us by Adam's original sin and our own actual sins. Our Blessed Lady remained, and remains, whole and intact, body and soul together, such that her original beauty continued untarnished, thereby fitting her for heaven from the beginning.

Therefore it is natural to her, in her untainted state, to be received directly into heaven, body and soul together, whole and intact, at the end of her natural life here on earth, in a way that can never be natural for the rest of us, tainted by sin as we are.

Whilst it is seemly that the feast of Our Lady's coronation as Queen of Heaven occurs on the octave day of her Assumption – after all, as a priest friend of mine used to say, it takes at least a week to prepare for a coronation – nevertheless there is also something arguably even more fitting that on the octave day of Our Lady's Assumption is celebrated, in the Traditional Latin Mass, the feast of her Immaculate Heart, the purest symbol of her divinely bestowed beauty, which won for her such a remarkable drawing up into heaven at the end of her time on earth.

She is indeed, the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the highest honour of our race, and the King desired her beauty.