

## Homily 8-15-17

There is a holy card with an unusual image of Mary. You might even see it sometimes in a stained-glass window. It's not a typical image of Mary like Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Grace, Our Lady of Guadalupe. This image shows Mary as visibly pregnant and reading from a book, praying from Scripture. Mary is reading the Word while she carries the Word. The Word is within her and without her. Do you remember the story in chapter 11 of Luke's gospel? A woman in the crowd cried out praising the womb that bore Christ and the breasts that nursed him. But then Jesus changed the subject, "Rather", he replies, "blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it". That may not sound like high praise for the Blessed Mother. But it most certainly is. Jesus is talking about the first disciple, the woman who heard the word and observed the word, and who carried the word. Mary responded to that word at every moment of her life with an un failing " Yes". Mary's holiness was not a matter of biology. It was much more than her physical reality. Making the Word incarnate involved more than DNA. It was a matter of faith.

I'm sure you've heard of the famous writer Henri Nouwen. Nouwen was a Dutch priest, scholar and academic who taught at Yale and Harvard 30 and 40 years ago. But he felt called by God to do something else with his life. He struggled with it and prayed about it for many years. He finally found the answer with the group L'Arche, founded by the great Canadian Jean Vanier. L'Arche cares for the mentally and developmentally disabled. Henri Nouwen, that deep thinking writer and intellectual, spent the last years of his life bathing those who could not bathe themselves, feeding them, celebrating the sacraments with them, but above all, seeing the beautiful face of Christ in each patient. I think Henri Nouwen, in many ways, "heard the Word of God and observed it", like the Blessed Mother. I think he also felt a profound connection to Mary's humanity and simplicity. In one of his journals he described how he met a priest who summed up Mary's life so beautifully. The priest said, " To look at Mary is to see God's original plan for humanity". Nouwen added, " In her we see the way God wanted us to be. Mary shows us how to receive the marvelous gift of God's love and how to respond to God's redemptive action in our lives". If we look at it that way, today's feast of the Assumption takes on even more meaning. Since Mary shows us "God's original plan for humanity", the way we were meant to be from the beginning, so too does her glorious Assumption. In the Assumption she is preserved forever before the face of God, freed from the corruption of the grave. Mary not only fulfills her own great destiny but offers us a beautiful glimpse of our own, if we carry the word in our own lives. This is what God dreams for us. The Assumption offers us that hope and that promise.

Our prayer today is to be found worthy of it, to model ourselves on the Mother of God in her humility and holiness. It means saying "Yes" to hearing the word of God and observing it, to live it, to embrace it. It has little to do with biology or physical descent. It

has everything to do with trust, with love, with obedience. It's all a matter of faith. As Henri Nouwen put it so beautifully, "A faith in him who became flesh in her, a faith that makes it possible for him to become flesh in us, too".

God love you!