Have you ever been asked: What is the big deal about Mary? Why did the Church decide to make this day a Holy Day of Obligation? Why do Catholics treasure Marian devotions and doctrines that many of our protestant brothers and sisters wrinkle their noses at? We celebrate today because I believe the Catholic Church is committed to telling the full story, to proclaim the full gospel.

But isn't the gospel all about Christ and what he did and taught? Well, Yes! And there are certain people, such as the Virgin Mary, who tell us quite a bit about Christ and a lot about ourselves as well. One way to understand things is to consider: the gospel is about Christ, in the same way that the story of “the fall of mankind” is about Adam. But as soon as we say that, we become seriously aware of a missing link.

The story of “the fall” is not only the story of Adam but the story of Adam and Eve. If St. Paul is right in saying that Jesus is the new Adam, we can ask ourselves, who is the new Eve? Well Mary, of course! Mary is the new Eve. Just as the full story of humanity’s “fall” cannot be told without Eve, so also the full story of our redemption cannot be told without Mary.

I think you are going to be fascinated with the many revealing parallels between the old Adam and Eve, on the one hand, and the new Adam and Eve, Jesus and Mary, on the other. Here are some of the parallels, some are playful and some are profound. Let’s begin.

In the old order, according to Genesis’ account, the woman (Eve) came forth from the body of the man (Adam), but in the new order, the man (Jesus) comes forth from the body of the woman (Mary). Any disagreements?

In the old order, following Genesis again, the woman (Eve) first disobeyed God and led the man (Adam) to do the same. What do we have in the new order? The woman (Mary) is the one who first said "Yes" to God (Luke 1:38) and then led her son Jesus to do the same. She was, after all, a good Jewish mother.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve, in their insatiable cravings, gladly disobeyed God. In the Gospel, the new Adam and Eve, Jesus and Mary, suffered greatly as they followed the Father’s will resolutely. The sword of sorrow pierced both of their hearts, so to speak. (John 19:34; Luke 2:35b).
In the old order Adam and Eve, and their descendants, shared immediately in the resulting consequences and punishments of “the fall”. In the new order, Jesus and Mary, share immediately in the blessings of the paschal mystery. They now experience the fullness of life with God; Jesus through the Ascension and Mary through the Assumption. Those, who through their baptism have configured themselves to Christ, now have an invitation to one day eternally share the fullness of life with God. And so, the doctrine of the Assumption teaches that at the end of her earthly existence, the Blessed Virgin Mary was taken up (assumed), body and soul, into heaven. Why should we care about this? We should care because there are now two human bodies we know of to be in heaven with God at this time: the human body of Jesus and the human body of Mary. Bodies people, bodies, not just spirits, but also bodies. The tomb was empty on Easter morning, you see. The meaning of this feast day points directly to the revelation that our human bodies are made for heaven.

You see, I believe Marian doctrines and devotions properly understood and practiced, do not lead believers away from Christ. Marian doctrines and devotions, properly understood, lead us more deeply into the mystery of Jesus Christ. The celebration of the incarnation at Christmas, the celebration of the annunciation, the celebration of the resurrection at Easter, the celebration of the Ascension, and today’s celebration of the Assumption of Mary, body and soul into heaven, are all feast days that affirm the goodness of the human body.

Our fleshy, human bodies, though frail, are nevertheless sacred, and have a vocation in the eternity God has planned for us. The body is a sacred gift that will miraculously rise and be renewed on the last day. One obvious invitation among many can be to take an inventory of the ways we could treat our bodies and the bodies of others with greater respect. Just go down the list, do I take care of my body like I should, am I respectful of other people, do I look at other people as being in the image and likeness of God or do I look at other people the way I, well, really shouldn’t? The body is a sacred gift to be celebrated, not abused. There is so much we can learn from Jesus through Mary. There is so much we can learn about ourselves.
[VIGIL]

I believe all of this is contained in what St. Paul teaches us in our second reading. “Brothers and sisters: When that which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about: Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

I also believe this is how to understand our Gospel reading. Someone cries out to Jesus, “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.” Jesus replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” Clearly, his mother taught him well! My friends, through the waters of baptism, we have been adopted into Jesus’ family, a family whose address happens to be in heaven. The feast day we celebrate this evening is a joyful reminder that we are destined for eternal life. Our mother Mary has shown us the way.

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I believe all of this is contained in what St. Paul teaches us in our second reading. “For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life”. Do you see it?

I also believe this is how to understand our Gospel reading. Mary says, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name.” My friends, through the waters of baptism, we have been adopted into Jesus’ family, a family whose address happens to be in heaven. Today’s feast day is a joyful reminder that we are destined for eternal life. Our mother Mary has shown us the way.