

Our Lady's Last Moments

A collection of rare and fascinating insights from saints and mystics about the death and assumption of Mary

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“The glorious transition of the great Mother of God from this life to the next took place in the same hour in which her divine Son had died, at three o’clock on a Friday, the thirteenth day of August, she being seventy years of age . . .”

This information about the last moments of Mary’s life was written by Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus of Agreda, a seventeenth century nun and mystic who is said to have witnessed these events while in ecstatic states at various times during her life.

In these visions, which are documented in her monumental book, *The Mystical City of God*, she said that when Our Lady died, even though she

was 70 years old, she appeared to be only about 33, having neither grey hair nor wrinkles.

Although this makes for great reading, none of it can be used to verify how the Blessed Virgin Mary passed from this life into eternity.

No town or country in Christendom has ever claimed to possess her body – or the tomb – where she was supposedly laid. Because even the tiniest fragment of her body would have become the most jealously regarded relics in the Christian world, and no such claim has ever been made, it has always been commonly believed that the end of her



life was the occasion of some great miracle.

Some believe she was assumed into heaven without dying, much like the prophets Enoch and Elijah. Of course, no one deserved this privilege more than Mary who, unlike Enoch and Elijah, was conceived without sin. Not only was she exempt from suffering death, she did not have to wait until the Final Judgment for the resurrection of her body.

This latter belief was made official by Pope Pius XII in the Dogmatic Bull of Nov. 1, 1950, in which the Assumption was defined. "The bodies of the just, therefore, after dust, return to dust. Only in the last days are they joined once more in glory to their souls. But God wished the Blessed Virgin Mary to be exempt from this general law. For she, by a singular privilege had conquered sin through her immaculate conception and, therefore, she was not subject to the law of corruption in the grave. Nor did she need to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body."

Some believe as St. Alphonsus Liguori wrote in his classic, *The Glories of Mary*, that Mary chose to undergo death in order to be more like her Son. How and when this happened, has been the subject of much speculation through the centuries, and many of the written accounts of the saints and Fathers agree on certain points.

For instance, it is commonly believed that the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced the impending hour of her death. To this joyful announcement she responded the same way as when this glorious messenger appeared to her the first time.

"I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say (Lk 1:38)."

Almost all writers have the apostles assembled at the time of Mary's death, with some authors alleging that they were transported from their distant missions by miraculous means. These means are similar to other descriptions of the angelic mode of flight, which closely resemble the experience of Habakkuk (Dn 14:35) who was lifted up into the air by an angel and set down moments later near Daniel in Babylon which was hundreds of miles away. According to the Apocrypha of the Apocalypse, a collection of noncanonical early Church writings, the apostles had similar experiences of being surrounded by light and then "caught up in the clouds" before being brought to Mary's bedside.

Once assembled, the apostles knelt alongside Mary's couch where they received her blessing and promise of heavenly protection for the Church. According to St. Alphonsus, she then laid back and "already felt in her heart a great joy, the forerunner of the Bridegroom, which inundated her with an unaccustomed and novel sweetness." She was languishing in love when hosts of angels began to come in great choirs, surrounding the "heavenly phoenix who was already losing her life . . ."

In most accounts, Jesus Himself came for Mary, but only in St. Alphonsus' rendition did He appear "with His cross in His hands to show the special glory He had obtained by the redemption." He then gave His mother the viaticum, saying with tender love, "Receive, O Mother, from my hands that same body which thou gave to me."



After she received communion, with her last breath, she said, “My Son, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

At that moment, her soul left her body.

“The apostles saw that her soul was of such whiteness, that no tongue of mortals can worthily utter it,” the Apocrypha describes, “for it surpassed all the whiteness of snow, and of every metal, and of gleaming silver, by the great brightness of its light.”

Several saints also wrote about this moment, including St. Bridget, who said the entire room where Our Lady was lying was bathed in a light so brilliant her body was unapproachable, even to the maids who were to anoint her for burial. St. Peter took this as a sign from God that Mary’s remains were not to be handled in the ordinary way. Only after the effulgence dimmed could the

apostles lift her couch, place it upon a bier, and carry her to a new sepulcher.

Of course, Mary had already received her heavenly reward and was seated at the right hand of her Son, a place neither man nor angel will ever achieve.

Meanwhile, for two days the apostles remained in mourning near the sepulcher. In the early morning hours of the third day, the Apocrypha states that “suddenly the Lord Jesus Christ came with a great multitude of angels, with a halo of great brightness gleaming and said to the apostles, ‘Peace be with you!’ and they answered and said ‘Let thy mercy be upon us. O Lord, as we have hoped in you.’”

Jesus then revealed His desire that not only should His mother’s body remain incorrupt, it should also be glorified without having to wait for the resurrection of the dead. “And He ordered the Archangel Michael to bring the soul of St. Mary,” the Apocrypha recounts. “And behold the Archangel Michael rolled back the stone of the tomb and the Lord said, ‘Arise, my beloved . . .’ and immediately Mary rose from the tomb . . .” Because her body was now glorified, Mary was able to issue from the tomb without disturbing anything.

Jesus then gathered her up into His arms and “was lifted up on a cloud, and taken back into heaven, and the angels along with Him, carried the blessed Mary into the paradise of God.”

