The author of the Book of Revelation, while sketching a kind of icon of the Church in human history, surely presents us with an image of Our Lady assumed into heaven. He writes: “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.”

My brothers and sisters, the teaching of the Catholic Church is clear: Mary, the Mother of God, is the first member of the human race to benefit fully from Christ’s victory over sin and death. Christ’s victory over sin was realized in Mary’s Immaculate Conception. By virtue of Our Lord’s Sacrifice, Mary was preserved from inheriting the stain of Adam’s sin. She was full of grace from the first moment of her conception. Beautiful in soul and body. Prepared by grace to be the perfect pure response to God’s Word.

These words from the Song of Songs have been for centuries applied to Our Lady, in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception: “You are all together beautiful, my beloved, and there is no stain in you.”

Christ’s victory over death was realized in Mary’s Assumption into heaven. At the end of her life on Earth, Mary, without experiencing the corruption of the grave, was taken body and soul into the glory of heaven.

St. Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians explains that the Christian who dies in the grace of Christ will share in the glorious resurrection when the Lord returns at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead.

The solemnity of the Assumption of Mary into heaven reminds us each year that Christ’s victory over death has happened in one human person, in one woman. In 1950, when Pope Pius XII solemnly defined the dogma of the Assumption, he simply said: “The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever-Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”

So mysterious was Mary’s passage from this world to the next, that the Holy Father hesitated to call that passage a death. Although we know nothing about Mary’s last days on Earth, except that she was taken by her Son, body and soul, into heaven, many holy men and women in our Church have held and hold that Mary, like Christ, and like each of us, experienced bodily death.

Eastern Christians call Mary’s death, her Dormition, her falling asleep. Catholics of the West call her death, the Assumption. Those saints and doctors of the Church, including St. John Damascene in the East and St. Francis de Sales in the West, explain the unique significance of Mary’s death.

First of all, Mary died to be in solidarity with Christ and in communion with all her sons and daughters who must face the sad reality of dying.

Second, her death unlike the deaths of all of her sons and daughters was not a punishment for
the original sin. Because she was preserved from the stain of sin by the grace of her Immaculate Conception, Mary’s death was a sharing in Christ’s death for her sons and daughters.

In fact, St. Francis de Sales preached that Mary would have died with Christ on Calvary. She would have died with Him of love had He not prevented her from dying. Christ willed that she remain with His new-born Church, to strengthen His disciples in faith and charity, and to bear witness to the mystery of the Incarnation.

According to St. John Damascene and St. Francis de Sales, Mary’s death was beautiful. It was not surrounded by fear and anxiety, there was no struggle, rather when it came time for her to pass from this life to the Father she literally died of love of her Son.

Our Lady freely, even joyfully, handed over her soul to the Father in the last act of love. An act of love like Christ’s act of love on the Cross when He cried out, “Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit.”

Christ had taught Mary how to die on Calvary. And when the moment came, drawing upon His grace, she freely offered her life and her death for us and for our salvation.

Pope St. John Paul II described Mary’s passage from this life in this way, he says: “The New Testament provides no information on the circumstances of Mary’s death. This silence leads one to suppose that it happened naturally, with no detail particularly worthy of mention. If this were not the case, how could the information about it have remained hidden from her contemporaries and not have been passed down to us in some way. As to the cause of Mary’s death, the opinions that wish to exclude her from death by natural causes seem groundless. It is more important to look for the Blessed Virgin’s spiritual attitude at the moment of her departure from this world. In this regard, St. Francis de Sales maintains that Mary’s death was caused by a transport of love. He speaks of a dying in love, from love, and through love. Going so far as to say that the Mother of God died out of love for her Son, Jesus. Whatever from the physical point of view was the organic, biological cause of the end of her bodily life, it can be said that for Mary the passage from this life to the next was the full development of grace in glory. So that no death can ever be so fittingly described as a dormition, a falling asleep, as her’s.” The Holy Father continues: “In some of the writings of the Church Fathers, we find Jesus Himself, described as coming to take His Mother at the time of her death to bring her into heavenly glory. In this way, they present the death of Mary as an event of love, which conducted her to her Divine Son to share His immortal life. At the end of her earthly life, she must have experienced like Paul, and more strongly, the desire to be freed from her body in order to be with Christ forever. The experience of death personally enriched the Blessed Virgin, by undergoing mankind’s common destiny she can more effectively exercise her spiritual motherhood towards those approaching the last moments of their lives.

The dogma of the Assumption affirms that Mary, without experiencing the corruption of the grave, even for a moment, immediately shared in Christ’s physical resurrection from the dead.
As tenderly as she carried Christ in her womb and as a new-born child, He carried her into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Another verse from the Song of Songs has been used to describe the Blessed Mother in the mystery of her Assumption: “Who is this who grows like the dawn? As beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as awesome as an army in full array.”

On this great Solemnity of the Assumption, let us turn to our Blessed Mother assumed into heaven and beg her for the graces that we need. The grace to have greater confidence, boundless confidence in the power of her intercession, and in her ability to intervene in our lives with saving grace. Let’s beg her for the grace to teach us to do everything from the motive of the love of God, to offer all of our sufferings, especially our last sufferings and our deaths, in love for God and for the salvation of others. As our mother, Mary wants to teach us to practice the love of God in everything we do. Even in our final agony and in our death.

And finally, let us as Mary, assumed into heaven, filled with Divine Life, to fill us with hope in our resurrection from the dead on the last day.

Allow me to conclude with words from the Second Vatican Council’s dogmatic constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, the Fathers of the Council in a very beautiful way described Mary’s assumption into glory. They say: “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 sure sign of hope and solace to the people of God during their journey on Earth.”