



Fra Donatus Forkan
Prætor Generalis

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THE FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY INTO HEAVEN

**“See the beauty of the daughter of Jerusalem, who ascended to heaven
like the rising sun at dawn”**

(Morning Prayer antiphon)

TO THE WHOLE ORDER

Dear brothers and sisters in Hospitality,

Preamble

Belonging to an international body or organisation has many positive aspects to it. These include the enjoyment of a variety of cultures, experiences, traditions and, of course, languages. But there are other aspects that one needs also to be aware of, otherwise there could be misunderstandings and a breakdown in communication. One simple example of this is the time when people take their annual vacation. In countries that have good weather all year round this is not an issue; people take their vacation when the schools are closed so that they can be together as a family or at other times according to their preferences. But in countries where there are four distinct seasons, people tend to take their vacation during the summer season.

Given this scenario, it is not easy, and could even prove impossible, to arrange an event that covers the globe. This was brought home to me at our recent Extraordinary General Chapter when it was proposed that the Order annually celebrate *Saint John of God Family Day* on 19 January – the day on which John of God’s companion and best friend, Juan D’Avila – Augulo – died. When the feedback from the working groups is presented to the Assembly at a Chapter there is usually a great variety of opinions on most issues. However, when it came to the proposal that 19 January be chosen as the day on which to celebrate Saint John of God Family Day, there was general agreement that this was not possible! The reasons presented were very practical; for the Europeans that date falls in the middle of winter so it would be difficult to have a real family-type celebration. For those

in the southern hemisphere the proposed date would not be possible because most people are on holiday in January. Those capitulars who came from 'permanently' sunny parts of the world probably wondered what all the fuss was about. However, they supported the prevailing opinion of their group. As happens in these situations it was left to each region to decide when to celebrate *Saint John of God Family Day*, but to present Angulo as the *archetype* of the Co-worker¹.

Here in Europe we are into the holiday season, a time of relaxation and catching-up with family and friends. It's a time to withdraw from everyday life and responsibilities and to relax. The scriptural readings during this month seem to fit in with this experience. But when one reflects on the text it becomes clear that we need to look beyond our immediate family and friends to our sisters and brothers who are sick, hungry and rejected. Given the times that we are living through, with so many people out of work, homes being repossessed by banks, family holidays having to be cancelled, and difficulties in meeting mortgage payments etc., as Christians, surely we are being called to share with our neighbour in need and, in the true spirit of hospitality, perhaps to give up our seat at table, to share and serve others in whatever way we can.

Mary, Queen of Hospitality

In this spirit of concern for others we have only to look to Mary, Queen of Hospitality, for inspiration and guidance. In Luke's Gospel (1:39) we have a beautiful example of Mary's sense of hospitality in her hurrying off to be with her cousin Elizabeth at a critical time in her life. We have another example in the marriage feast of Cana,² where Mary intervenes and asks her son to perform a miracle to save the embarrassment of the young couple and their families. In all of this Mary would not take any of the credit but she would point to the Father and say "The Almighty has done great things for me...because of this all generations will call me blessed."

Mary Assumed into Heaven

It is the Feast of the Assumption into Heaven of our Blessed Mother that I wish to reflect briefly upon. It is an event that can be described as the summit of Mary's life journey towards the Father. The Assumption of Mary into Heaven means that she died like all human beings, including her Son, but "she was exempted from the sentence of decay; she shared her Son's victory over death, and was carried up to heaven, soul and body."³

Even though her life was preserved from sin Mary remains the sister and mother of all sinners, in solidarity with us as we journey along our path towards the homeland where she has already gone before us, accompanying us with her maternal intercession. John

¹ Br. M. De Mina, *Hermanos Hospitalarios*, 163, p 110-113, 1991

² John 2: 1-11

³ Pope Pius XII on Assumption of Mary into heaven

the Evangelist states that the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1.14). It was in Mary’s womb that God became flesh and dwelt among us. Mary was always sensitive and open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in her own heart and around her, but in a unique way she became the *home of the Trinity* at the moment of her Immaculate Conception. Mary is described as the new Eve because of the central role that she played in our redemption, accepting to be the mother of our Saviour Jesus and accompanying him all the way to the foot of the cross – an experience that defies description. We can only sit in silence and gaze at the Pietà, a mother holding the body of her dead son, and allow the scene to speak to our hearts.....

Mary understands our struggles

There is no doubt that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, clearly understands the challenges that each day brings into our lives. The challenges of raising a family, living on limited resources and possibilities, bringing up children and seeing them grow into adulthood and the pain of letting them go to make a life for themselves. But she experienced the true joy of every mother in her own heart. Can you imagine the joy of sitting at the table made by her husband Joseph and his assistant, Jesus, sharing their intimate family chatter and the moments of silence when they pondered and wondered what God’s ultimate plan was for their very special and gifted child.

Mary also experienced all the adversities that life can bring, even the experience of having her heart transfixed by the sword as she stood on Calvary beside her Son in the final moments of his life. At the foot of the Cross, Mary was united with the agony and pleading prayer of her dying son “Father if it is possible (not all things may be possible) take away this chalice from me... but not as I will but as you will.” (Mt. 26:39; 26:42: Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34). Mary, with her son, fully accepted, even in the moments of darkness and suffering, God’s project of love and nurtured in her heart her total self-giving into the hands of the Lord, to be a model for the faith of the Church (Lumen Gentium 64-65).

Mary is our Star to follow

The Assumption reminds us that Mary’s life, no differently from the life of any other Christian, is a path of *sequela Christi*, a path which has a very clear goal, a future already marked out: the final victory over sin and death and full communion with God. “*On the completion of her earthly sojourn, she was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory,*” the Council tells us, “*and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and the conqueror of sin and death.*”(LG, 59). In Our Lady assumed into heaven we contemplate the fullness of her faith, and that path of faith which she shows each and every one of us.

Our life is a path along which we move, constantly, caught up in the struggle between good and evil. This is the state of human history. It is like a voyage across what is often a stormy sea; Mary is the Pole Star who guides us to her Son, the sun that rises above the shadows of history (cf. Spe Salvi, 49) and gives us the hope that we need, the hope that we can win through. We never give up completely because God helps us and guides us

and our hope is this presence of the Lord within us, which becomes visible in Mary assumed into heaven.

Let us share the joy of this moment

My dear brothers and sisters, I wish to share this joy with all of you today, the joy that springs from contemplating the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven. It is a joy for the great gift of God in Our Lady, as "a sign of sure hope" (LG 68) for the whole of humanity. Today, our prayer is addressed to her, invoked as "Queen of Hospitality", asking her to intercede with her Son for all of us, so that through our Hospitality we, too, can become a sign of hope for our brothers and sisters who feel abandoned, sick, lonely or discouraged at this time.

For those who are taking their annual leave at this time I wish a restful holiday and pray that you will return refreshed and enlivened with renewed vigour for the things of Saint John of God!

To all I extend my fraternal good wishes in St John of God

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donatus Forkan O.H.", written in a cursive style.

Br. Donatus Forkan, O.H.,
Prior General