

**Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – August 15, 2018
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One of the prayers that seems to appeal to people of every religious tradition is the “Serenity Prayer.” Sometimes attributed to the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, the prayer has been popularized by Twelve-Step programs. Most of us know the first part of the prayer by heart: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.” Few realize that the prayer actually has a second paragraph: “Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.” It is a beautiful prayer that reminds us of many important truths – that we are invited to trust in God and to surrender to His will, that our goal in this life is serenity and reasonable happiness, because our ultimate goal is supreme happiness in the next life. The prayer is common ground for Catholics, Protestants, and people of other religious traditions as well.

The solemnity – the mystery – the life – that we celebrate today is hardly common ground for Catholics and Protestants. It is said that in some Protestant churches, Mary is merely a figure in the Christmas manger scene – and then only because they cannot think of a way to eliminate her. Perhaps because of the prominence of the Blessed Virgin Mary within the Catholic tradition, many Protestants often run from her in the opposite direction. Yet Mary is the perfect example of what it means to be a disciple – the perfect embodiment of the serenity prayer – and it is that faith, that serenity we celebrate today.

Throughout her life, Mary trusted God completely. She listened attentively to the startling message of the angel that she would conceive and bear a son by the power of the Holy Spirit and trusted that somehow He would see her through the dangers and difficulties of becoming pregnant while only betrothed to Joseph. Mary endured the pain of her son’s crucifixion without ever leaving the foot of the cross, without ever calling out in anger or frustration, without ever rejecting the will of God as each of us might have done. Even in that most difficult hour, when the lifeless body of her son was placed in her arms, Mary indeed understood that accepting hardships was the pathway to peace. She did not pay lip-service to discipleship, she lived it – in large ways and in small, in the good times of her life with Jesus and Joseph and in the times of great sorrow. As we heard in today’s

gospel, even in times of difficulty, Mary's spirit continually rejoiced in God our Savior.

Today's feast, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is more than a celebration of her entry – body and soul – into heaven. All of us hope for that moment. In our Profession of Faith each Sunday we proclaim our own faith in the “resurrection of the body and life everlasting.” We proclaim our hope that through the power of Jesus Christ – at the end of time – we too will be supremely happy in heaven, body and soul. Our feast today proclaims that Mary already enjoys that happiness in heaven because she fully embraced discipleship on earth. You and I struggle with discipleship, we pray the serenity prayer because our lives are often anything but serene. We ask God for the grace to surrender to his will, even though our nature, our experience, our very being seems to pull us in the opposite direction. Not so with Mary. She lived the Christian life, she lived serenity in ways that continue to amaze us. Had the angel appeared to us, had we been at the foot of the cross, had our hearts been pierced with the swords of sadness and sorrow, it is fair to say that acceptance would not have been our first reaction. We would have tried everything to change the unchangeable, to escape from the inevitable, to bring this sinful world into compliance with our will. Mary provides us with the perfect example of the disciple precisely because she was completely willing to let God be God. She did not try to take his place, to tell him what to do. Instead, she proclaimed herself his handmaid, his servant, the one who did his will. She allowed the greatness of the Lord to shine forth throughout her life. That's why we gather to celebrate today – not just because of the grace of her entry into heaven, but because of her life's journey, the abundance of grace that brought her to that point. Whether they know it or not, when Catholics or Protestants or people of any tradition pray the serenity prayer, we are praying to be like Mary – in her trust of God, in her surrender to his will, in her acceptance of his abundant grace.