

The Assumption

August 15, 2026

Reverend Robert Gillelan - Homily

In celebrating the Solemnity of the Assumption, we celebrate that at the end of Mary's life, as the doctrine says, when her earthly life was concluded - it doesn't say specifically whether she died or fell asleep - Eastern Catholics call this feast day the Dormition, indicating that their belief is more that Mary went quietly asleep and then was assumed, body and soul, into heaven.

And that God granted her grace and privilege, without going to the grave, because of her Immaculate Conception, being conceived without sin, then living her life to a life of great holiness. And so, for us, she is this beautiful sign of hope that where Mary has gone from the world, we hope to follow.

As you heard in my reading, this is also our patronal feast day, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It's in the name of our parish.

Do you know that this is also the anniversary of the consecration of this parish? Sort of.

Because the document in the sacristy right back there tells us that this church was actually consecrated on August 14th, 1977. Bishop Daley then mandated that August 15th would be the date we'll be celebrating the dedication, because it's the Feast of the Assumption. Now, I'm curious, how many of you were here on August 14th, 1977, for the consecration of this church?

I see a few of you were here on August 14th. Well, that was 49 years ago, so....

But consecrating a church - what does that mean? It means sanctifying this specific building for the exclusive worship of God.

That is a great ceremony for those of you who were here and experienced it. A consecration of the church is done by a bishop.

Secondly, it is usually done when the church is debt-free. So, congratulations. In 1977, after just a few years, the church had paid off its mortgage. So there is no outside encumbrance, no financial institutions or banks or mortgages, so that it is unencumbered and can be dedicated solely to God and the worship of God.

One of the main features of that, when the bishop comes to consecrate the church, is he smears it with chrism in 12 places on the walls.

You can see, around the church, there are 12 candles that are lit. And it's custom to light those candles on this feast day. We also light them at Christmas and Easter. But that's where, or in the vicinity, where the bishop put chrism on the church and consecrated it in that way, symbolic of the foundation of the 12 Apostles.

Also, Bishop Daley would have anointed this altar with holy chrism.

And the relics. Now, in some churches, on the day of consecration, relics are actually placed within the altar.

So, I assume these were pre-placed, were probably already in place, or did they come later? So, on that day, Deacon believes that these relics were placed in this reliquary in the altar. This is the first church in the world to have relics of the first three American saints: St. John Neumann, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and St. Frances Xavier Cabrini. And why? Why would we do that? Why would we put relics in the altar?

Because the ancient Christians used to go to the graves of the saints and worship there. And at some point in the ceremony, these altar candles were lit as a sign of Christ as a light in the world.

So, an altar cloth would have been placed on the altar. The altar itself was anointed, symbolic of the altar being the sign of Christ himself.

And then the altar cloth, the sign of the table of the Lord. The altar being not only the altar of sacrifice, but the banquet table, from which we receive the sacred Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

I think that is most of the highlights of a consecration ceremony, but it is a very, very profound experience to be a part of. And if you say, well, you know, I've heard that Catholic churches sometimes get sold. How can that be? Well, they can be.

They are relegated to profane, but not sordid use. And of course, sordid is in the eye of the beholder.

In Steelton, two Catholic churches were sold. One is a Muslim mosque now. And another one is a Hindu temple. And in Pittsburgh, St. John the Baptist Church is now a microbrewery. And I've been there, and the beer vats are in what we call the sanctuary.

But that's only after these churches have been kind of decommissioned. The proper term is relegated to profane, but not sordid use.

But we can let go of those sordid affairs today because we are here to celebrate what God has done for our Blessed Mother in raising her up, body and soul, to the glory of heaven. And also to give thanks to Almighty God for the gift of this beautiful church that, for us, is dedicated fully and entirely to the worship of the one true God, His Son and our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we are able to do so in the power of the Holy Spirit. So, happy feast day and happy anniversary.

Homily text prepared from an audio transcript. Minor punctuation, paragraphing, and obvious transcription corrections were made for readability while preserving Father Bob's wording.