

**“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”**

*Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo*

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“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” Or perhaps we could say, “Blessed is she who heard the word of God, and kept it.” This evening the Church begins her celebration of the Assumption of Mary, a day of great joy. And how fitting that we should also celebrate today the Admission to Candidacy of our brother(s) who stand before us.

Mary was an intimate companion on her Son’s journey from the very first moment of his entry into our world. But even before this, she was attentive to the voice of God, so that when Gabriel brought to her God’s invitation to bear his Son, she said, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word.” This must have been startling and mysterious to Mary, but because she was already in deep communion with God, she could say, in effect, “Here I am, send me.” Mary recognized the voice and the call of God, and she trusted in his will. She was her own Son’s first and most perfect disciple, and she accompanied him every step of the way, both in body and in spirit.

So, when Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it,” one cannot help thinking of his very own Mother. She said yes to Gabriel, and then she endured the hardship of this motherhood: the journey to Bethlehem, the birth in a stable, the flight into Egypt, even the distance of her Son during his public ministry. She turned to him in supplication for the sake of others, as at the wedding feast at Cana. And at the end of that journey, she even stood at the foot of his cross, undoubtedly sorrowful but also steadfast. And later she prayed with the Apostles and the early Church, the earthly members of her Son’s Mystical Body. In all things, Mary accepted perfectly God’s will, and it is that perfection that made her so completely one with her Son. Her perfect obedience allowed her to share more deeply than any other person in the mystery of her Son’s mission. And it was this obedience, given completely out of love, that made it possible for her to draw so near to God made man.

But how could this closeness, this intimate union simply end in death? Like all of us, Mary was mortal. But faithful to the end, Mary was given a special participation in Christ’s resurrection when, at the close of her life, she was assumed body and soul into heaven. When Jesus opened the gates of heaven to our human nature, what could be more fitting than to call his first and most perfect disciple to dwell at his side: Mary.

Mary always and only said “yes” to her Son, and she leads others to him. These might be the key lessons we can learn from her, especially those who today petition for candidacy. Like Mary, you have said yes to our Lord’s call, you have uttered your own, “Let it be done to me according to your word.” These are the most liberating words in the world. They set us free from our own willfulness and from whatever fears we might have about the future. Like Mary we can trust in God’s love for us, and allow him to do with us as he wills. My sons, as you step forward today, you are mystically united with Mary, and she stands with you before her loving Son. She

reassures you as you give yourself into the hands of our Lord, and by her own glorious Assumption, she shows you that this is the way to his Kingdom.

But Mary also says, “Do whatever he tells you.” She directs us toward her Son, and urges us to listen and to obey. As you advance on this path towards the priesthood, Mary will always urge you to listen to the voice of Jesus and to go where he leads you. Listen to him in prayer, listen to him in the Sacred Scriptures, listen to him even in those who are responsible for your formation. Jesus will continue to speak to you and invite you to an ever deeper friendship with him. Just as he formed his own mother as his disciple, he will continue to form you as well. So, my dear sons, as you are called today to be candidates for Holy Orders, resolve with Mary always to say yes to our Lord, and to do whatever he tells you. For “blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.”