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THE HEART OF MARY



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THE HEART OF MARY

Mentioning the Heart of Mary invites us to reach the inner self of Mary, the will and love which make the center and the source of her interior life. But to better understand Mary's heart, we have to put her in her true place. First of all, she is a member of our human community, a woman who is very much on our side, who shares our condition (except for the sin of which she has been preserved); and then as a model for the believers. She is therefore the Mother of the Church.

MARY, A WOMAN OF OUR HUMAN COMMUNITY

We can contemplate Mary as a humble, poor and pious young woman, one among the believers waiting for the Kingdom of God – she was the first to believe in Jesus Christ. A courageous woman who fully assumes the decision to be a mother. She supported the difficult life of an occupied country and fled her homeland because the child she has just given birth to was threatened with death. She saw her son to distance himself from his human family and she was finally present when he was condemned by the authorities of his times to a humiliating criminal's death. This strong and courageous woman has witnessed all this as a wise woman and a believer. We have to admit that in no way the evangelists try to underline the greatness of Mary with exceptional light, or in prodigies and miracles! On the contrary, as for all the human beings, Mary loved, suffered and had happy and unhappy experiences (the joyful and painful mysteries). Yet through all of this, she knew how to recognize the silent presence of God. Mary's life was not spared difficulties. Indeed, most of the episodes when Mary appears in the Gospels are problematic situations: with the Archangel Gabriel: "*How may this be, because I have had no knowledge of a man?*" »; when Jesus was born, no place for Mary and Joseph; when meeting with Simeon: "*a sword of pain will pierce your soul*"; later with Herod who wants the child dead; then in Jerusalem, when Jesus at the age of 12 disappeared for three days. Once more, at Cana, when there is no more wine. Finally, at the foot of the cross, when Mary is present at the death of her Son. And each time, Mary keeps confident and faithful to what she had answered the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation: "*May everything be done to me according to your Word*"...

Mary is also a model for all the believers. If Mary is one of us, she has also a privileged place in the Church and in the heart of all the believers. The first centuries, since the Council of Ephesus in 431, proclaimed Mary as Mother of Christ and Mother of God. In the course of its history and reflection, the Church will proclaim Mary the Mother of the Church, who is conceived without sin, the Queen of Heaven. She also received many other titles that we may find in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Indeed, let us remember that before Jesus was born, Mary was blessed with an evangelical joy, granted to her by the favor of God: "*Rejoice, full of grace!*" Mary's response to Archangel Gabriel's call was immediate. She answered with unconditional faith, given with the greatest eagerness: "*Behold the servant*

of the Lord!” This quick and unreserved response is the perfect characteristic of those who decide to follow Jesus according to the Gospel. Answering in complete freedom, Mary placed herself unconditionally at the service of God! Therefore, Mary is happy, not because she carried Christ within her, but because she believed: *“Blessed is she who believed in the fulfillment of the words spoken to her from the Lord”*. It means happy are you who did not rely on yourself or on human power or conviction, but who abandoned yourself in the arms of God! In its # 55, the constitution “Lumen Gentium” of the Second Vatican Council reminds us that *“Mary fills out the first place among the humble and the poor of the Lord who hope and receive from him with confidence”*.

But there would be a risk in presenting Mary removed from our human reality and above our miserable daily life that she would fade away a little as a human daughter of Adam? How can we remain close to her heart, how can we imitate her gentleness and her humility if she remains an inaccessible model for us? It would be ignoring that if Mary is close to us in her life as a woman and a mother, she is also close to us in her journey of faith. When pondering on her faith, Mary is presented by the evangelists as being concerned by the same darkness as we are, journeying as the humblest believer... Luke is careful to note Mary's reactions: the visit of the angel Gabriel takes place in Mary's home in Nazareth and not in the grandiose setting of the Temple of Jerusalem makes her confused: *“But she was greatly troubled at his words, and said to herself, what may be the purpose of these words?”* (Lk 1, 29) – The revelation of God's project by the angel Gabriel questions her: *“How is this going to be done?”* » (Lk 1, 34) – Simeon's oracle raises her astonishment: *«And his father and mother were full of wonder at the things which were said about him»* (Lk 2, 33). Jesus's meeting in the Temple after three days of research and the word he addresses to his mother and to Joseph leaves them in a state of misunderstanding: *“They did not understand what he said to them”* (Lk 2, 50). Could it be that despite many revelations - from Gabriel, from Elizabeth, from the shepherds, from Simeon - on the identity of the child she had carried and brought into the world, and after having meditated in her heart what happened to him, Marie still does not understand? Or does Luke want us to understand that Mary's faith is the faith of God's people itself? Indeed, it is a humble faith that grows ever deeper through darkness and trials. For her as for each of us, Jesus's word is not always easy to understand.

THE HEART OF MARY

The heart of Mary has been presented to the worship of the religious community under several names: Temple of the Word, Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit covering her with his shadow, Immaculate Heart preserved from all sin, Wise Heart meditating on the scriptures and on her own life, a gentle Heart in the image of Christ's Heart, a simple heart humble enough to welcome God's plan, a firm heart making her stand up with courage at the cross...

To speak of the heart of Mary, it is to speak of that Heart where God's proposal and Man's response meet together in its intimacy. It is so because Mary has welcomed Jesus into her heart before carrying him in her womb. Thus, let us not be surprised that what drives

Jesus's heart also drives his Mother's heart. The heart of the Son and the heart of the Mother both beat in unison. The gentleness and humility of the heart of Christ find with no surprise an echo in the heart of Mary.

To refer to Mary's heart is to acknowledge this strong faith which keeps her trusting when all seems lost, and keeps her standing near the cross of Jesus. In fact, Mary's faith is the faith of the people of God: a humble faith that grows ever deeper through darkness and trials, thanks to meditating on salvation.

To enter into Mary's heart is therefore to allow ourselves to be challenged and transformed from within, in depth, and to learn from her the lessons from Nazareth:

- A lesson of silence first; in a world of noise and turmoil, we learn from Mary's meditation, this interiority which is the disposition of the heart to listen to God who speaks to us: "*But Mary kept all these words in her heart and gave much thought to them...and his mother kept all these words in her heart.* (Lk 2, 19. 51). Welcoming with faith God's will in these events, she remains silent as soon as Jesus enters public life. She remains silent until the cross and Pentecost.
- We learn a lesson in humility: remember her response to the Archangel Gabriel's announcement: "*I am the servant of the Lord*". We remember the Magnificat when Mary quickly goes further her personal gratitude - "my soul gives glory to the Lord" – and she lends her voice to the descendants of Abraham: "*He remembers his love, the promise made to our fathers, in favor of Abraham and his seeds forever*"
- To reach Mary's heart is to enter into the heart of the Church and learn how to live in order to make our God -who is merciful, open, patient, kind and welcoming- present to our world.

To enter into Mary's heart is to agree to follow her.

- On the path to the Church: Mary is the Mother of the Church. By welcoming Jesus, the Word of God into her Immaculate Heart, Mary is getting ready for the beginning of the Church. She receives her Son's Testament at the Cross, and in doing so, becomes the mother of all the believers. Jesus, seeing his mother and standing near her the disciple whom he loved, said to his mother: "*Woman, here is your son. Then he said to the disciple: "Here is your mother.* » Jn 19, 25-27.
- On the path to prayer: the Apostles and the first disciples "*faithfully participated in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus*" (Acts 1, 12-14). At Cana, it is Mary who obtains the new wine by her intercession. The time has come for the coming of the Hour, the gift of salvation. The believer's prayer passes through Mary's prayer. And when the apostles waited for the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Mary's pleading comes together with their own supplication, thus becoming the model of the Church in prayer.
- On the path to the Word: on Mary's advice, the servants are getting ready to respond to Christ: "*Do whatever he tells you*". It is from Jesus's word that this beatitude intended for Mary comes: "*A woman raised her voice in the middle of the crowd to say to her: "Blessed is the mother who carried you within her, and whose breasts fed you! Then Jesus said to him: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it! (Lk 11:27)*"

- On the path to mercy....

MERCY

In fact, we are able to touch deeply the sweetness and goodness of Mary's heart when we recognize her as a mother of mercy, in the image of her Son. Saint Augustine tells us: *“What may be mercy if it is not compassion for the misery of others and if it is not in our heart the absolute urge to help them if we can”*. As is often thought, Mercy is not a good feeling, a temporary emotion to face the distress of others. To be merciful is to decide to help, to put a stop to the evil that touches a person physically or morally. It is to give back love when one no longer deserves it. We can say that all mercy is love, but that all love is not necessarily mercy. In marriage, the love between two spouses is not based on mercy. It is a love of communion, mutual wonder and tenderness. But they are also called to forgive each other for their weaknesses, their faults and their respective misery. Thus, they will have mercy on each other. Likewise, a father and a mother love their child genuinely. They want to give him the best of themselves. They apply forgiveness when the child had made a mistake. Then forgive him for what he has done wrong. When he shed tears because he has been scolded, they console him.

MARY, MOTHER OF MERCY

In the “Salve Regina”, the Virgin Mary is called by the beautiful title of “Mother of Mercy”. This name has a double meaning:

*On the one hand, Mary is the mother of the Son of God, whose name is Mercy. Through her, he was made flesh. Mary is both in person and in deeds the Mother of Jesus, that is Mercy on our earth.

*On the other hand, Mary is known under this title, because she is overcome with an immense maternal compassion, and a merciful tenderness for all her children. She is the "All-Merciful". The Holy Curé of Ars said: *“In the heart of the Blessed Virgin, there is only mercy”*. In Lourdes, Marie is so full of respect, gentleness and kindness towards little Bernadette. She asks her: *“Would you like to make me the grace to come here for 15 days?”*

MARY, REFUGE FOR THE SINNERS

The heart of Mary’s message throughout the many apparitions of the Blessed Virgin in the world is a call to prayer and penance for sinners. Thus, in Lourdes, Mary invites Bernadette:

“Pray to God for the conversion of sinners”. Mary feels an immense compassion, and a mercy for sinners, because they offend the holiness and glory of God. They risk losing themselves. Mary is also all mercy, because she knows the price of sin. Saint John Paul II tells us: *“At the cross, Mary knows most thoroughly the mystery of divine mercy. She knows the price and how great it is”*. In her Immaculate Heart, Mary refuses sin as being a revolt against God. She does also because of the consequences of sin for the human being. In her tremendous mercy, she continually intercedes for sinners, she has compassion for them. Her heart as a Mother knows better than anyone how to touch their hearts, call them to conversion, and turn them to divine mercy. She is the refuge of sinners, and in the “Hail Mary” we tell her: “Pray for us, poor sinners”. So, it is simply accurate to turn to Mary, to entrust her with our worries when facing a death, a trial, an illness. It is right and just to implore her for help and intercession.

MARY, WAY OF MERCY FOR US

Praying to the Virgin Mary helps us in a very special and effective way to understand what mercy is, to welcome it, to live it and to bear witness to it. Mother of Mercy, Mary is truly the one through whom we can recognize, love, taste mercy, and discover all its joy. For Mary rejoices in the gaze of mercy that God cast upon her, this mercy which extends from age to age, from generation to generation, that is to say for us also even today.

Mary leads us in showing us the path to mercy. During the Visitation, she *“raised and set out hastily”*. Hastily means that Mary hurries with enthusiasm and diligence to share her joy with her relative Elizabeth. She has come to help her in the last months of her pregnancy. Mary's joy cannot be separated from her compassion and concern for Elizabeth. Mary turns away from her own plans to bring good and happiness to somebody else. Thus, the Visitation shows that deep closeness with God has consequences in relationships with others. Someone who knows how to keep close to God will only bring joy in meeting with others. This joy turns into exaltation of God.

Likewise at Cana, she observes discreetly. She sees the embarrassment that the lack of wine will cause for the bride and groom. The newlyweds in a seven-day wedding were supposed to provide the celebratory wine and food for all the guests. However, if they could not provide this food and drink, they risked being ridiculed. They could even lose their social position in the opinion of the people of the village. Marie is the first among the guests to see this problem for the newlyweds and their families. Her compassion becomes active in calling on to Jesus with a discreet remark: *“they have no more wine”*, and in making demand to the servants: *“whatever he tells you, do it” (Jn 2:5)*. We see that Mary strives to bring full help to Man. Therefore, she becomes a model of mercy in our attitude towards others.

The practice of Mercy is often done in fidelity to the Word of God. By listening to it, Mary is always ready to open this path for us, a path of evangelization, of announcing the Good News of Jesus who comes to us. Mercy then becomes evangelizing.

To conclude, let me refer to the Virtues of Mother Mary (Rose Giet), who reminds us *“that she had for the Blessed Virgin the love, respect and trust of a child for her mother. She had also studied the virtues, the dispositions of her heart, so good, so lovable, so perfect in an imitation of the heart of her divine Son... to the point of considering herself only as the humble servant of Mary... She recommended to turn to the Virgin Mary with filial confidence in order to always obtain the graces she needed! To this trust, Mother Mary added the imitation of her virtues: her purity, her humility, her obedience to the will of God, her love for Jesus...”*. What better witness your Congregation could dream of to pursue the mission entrusted to it by the Church 200 years ago? And what better example for your Congregation to be able to reveal the deep loving heart of Jesus and in that of his Mother to the whole world?