

THE HEART OF MARY

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"It is in the Heart of Mary that the world will find again true fraternity; it is by the Heart of Mary that it will obtain pardon and mercy of God; it is with the Heart of Mary that the new city will be built in truth, justice, and charity; it is for the Heart of Mary, for its honor and glory, that humanity, grateful and free, will in the near future increase its manifestations of love and filial gratitude."¹



HE "NEAR FUTURE" in these words of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort is perhaps the present day. Though humanity may not be grateful and free in many quarters, many men are turning to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In Mary, in her Immaculate Heart, they are seeking and finding the resolutions of their doubts, the calming of their anxieties, the dispelling of their confusion, the pacifying of their troubled souls. Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is spreading throughout the world. A few years ago the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, consecrated the Church and the human race to Mary's Immaculate Heart. Today nations, dioceses, parishes, and individual families are following the lead of their spiritual father and are imploring the Mercy of God through the intercession of His Mother's Immaculate Heart.

Devotion to the Heart of the Mother of God is centuries old.² References to Mary's heart are found among the writings of the Fathers. Saints of later ages, Mechtild, Bernadine of Siena, Francis de Sales, John Eudes, Louis-Marie De Montfort, were instrumental in bringing men to the knowledge and love of Mary and her Immaculate Heart. Yet tremendous impetus was given to the devotion by the revelations at Fatima, Portugal just thirty years ago. The Blessed Virgin appeared to three shepherd children on six different occasions. At each visit she conversed with Lucia, the eldest of the children. During the second apparition, Our Lady, after revealing that she would soon take Jacinta and Francisco, the two younger children, to heaven with her, addressed these words to Lucia:

¹ De Oca, Rev. V. Montes, C.S.Sp. *More About Fatima*. Quoted on cover.

² O'Carroll, Rev. Patrick, C.S.Sp. *Consecration to the Immaculate Heart*. pp. 14 ff. The Mercier Press Limited. Cork, Ireland. Cfr. for a concise history of the devotion.

"But you remain here for some time more. Jesus wishes to make use of you to have me acknowledged and loved. He wishes to establish in the world the devotion to my Immaculate Heart."³

During the third apparition, Our Lady again spoke of her heart to the children. After showing them a terrifying vision of hell, Our Lady said :

"You see hell, where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them God wishes to establish in the world the devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If they do what I will tell, many souls will be saved, and there will be peace."⁴

It was on the twenty-fifth anniversary of these apparitions that the world was consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and a few years later the new feast of the Immaculate Heart was promulgated and extended to the universal church. The legitimacy of this devotion is, then, beyond question. Holy Mother Church, guardian of the Faith, has placed the stamp of approval upon it and offers it to her children as an efficacious means of obtaining salvation. Nevertheless, inquiry may be made into the theological foundation of this devotion. Only when our devotion rests on a staunch doctrinal foundation will it escape the flights and fancies of sentimental piety. Nor may we seek the theological foundation at Fatima. The principles of theology are truths, not privately revealed, but those which are contained in the deposit of faith, Scripture and Tradition. Here in this twofold source may be found the basis for a sincere, vigorous, and sound devotion to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God.

CLOSE TO GOD

Honor or reverence is a testimony of someone's excellence. In offering this testimony we are able to distinguish two elements. First there is the person to whom we pay the reverence. Then there is the cause of the excellence of this person. The custom of kissing the hands of a newly ordained priest illustrates this truth. To kiss the hands of a priest is to testify to the priest's special excellence which is his by reason of his priesthood. Continuing the example we may ask, "But why are the hands kissed? Are they held in reverence, or is it the priest to whom we pay the reverence?" To answer this question there is need of another distinction. The person of the priest is the *total term* of our veneration; the hands, being an integral part of the

³ Walsh, William Thomas. *Our Lady of Fatima*. p. 69. The Macmillan Co. N. Y. 1947.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

priest, are a *partial term*. The hands of a priest are specially honored above the other parts of his body because in the hands is principally manifested the cause of the veneration, his priesthood. During the ordination ceremony, the hands of the ordinand are anointed. The hands of the consecrated priest thus become a sign of his priesthood, which is the reason for his special excellence.

The veneration which we offer to Our Lady is the cult of hyperdulia. Less than the worship which we offer to God (*latria*), it exceeds the honor or veneration which we render to the excellence of the saints (*dulia*). The basis for the honor that we pay to men is their closeness to God. St. Thomas says that "the greatest reverence is due to a man from the affinity which he has to God."⁵ Mary, however, is the Mother of God, and by reason of this divine maternity "she possesses a certain infinite dignity."⁶ Thus, the Angelic Doctor concludes that a veneration is due Our Lady "greater than to other creatures inasmuch as she is the Mother of God."⁷

What has been said above in the illustration of the custom of kissing the hands of a priest may be applied to the veneration of Our Lady. The person of Mary is the *total term* of the veneration of hyperdulia; the *cause* of her excellence is the divine maternity. In the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the person of Our Lady is still the total term. Her Immaculate Heart, an integral part of Our Lady, is the *partial term*. Thus, Our Lady is venerated in her physical heart. It is the heart of flesh that we honor in our devotion. It is the heart that was the principle of Mary's life during her sojourn on earth. It is the heart that poured forth the blood, nourishing the life of the Son of God hidden in her womb. It is the heart that beats this very moment in the glorified body of Our Lady in heaven.

SYMBOL OF LOVE

Why is the heart of Our Lady held in veneration? What is the cause of the special excellence which is manifested in her Immaculate Heart? The literal signification of the word heart is the physical organ of the body. Because of the intimate connection between the body and the emotions, the heart has even been considered as the organ of the passion of love. In a translated sense it is used to designate the affective life of man, his sensitive appetite, his will, and their movements. All of these usages are found in the pages of Sacred Scripture, yet

⁵ *Summa Theologica*, II II, 103, 4, ad 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 25, 6, ad 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 25, 5.

without doubt, among the figurative significations, the word heart primarily is employed as a symbol of love. In our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus we adore His Divine Person through His physical heart which is a symbol of His immense love for us. "This very love is the cause or reason of the special excellence (to which we attest in our devotion). For His love is an altruistic love of friendship. To love is to wish well to someone. Jesus, in order to efficaciously will good to us, suffered the greatest evil without gain for Himself. Hence His love is the reason for this greatest excellence."⁸ Similarly in our devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we venerate the person of Our Lady through her physical heart which is emblematic of her love for us. Christ showed His love for us by dying on the Cross and meriting all the graces necessary for our salvation. Mary showed her love for us by her compassion, meriting in a fitting manner (*de congruo*) all that her Divine Son had merited in strict justice (*de condigno*). At the foot of the Cross on Calvary she cooperated fully and perfectly with her Son; and, subordinated to Him, she co-redeemed mankind. The price of co-redemption was the intense sorrow which she willingly accepted. Her will was one with the will of her Son; and the motive which prompted Him to undergo the whole drama of the Passion was the motive urging her to accept the compassion, the love of men. Accordingly, Mary is the total term of our veneration in the devotion to her Immaculate Heart. Her heart, the partial term, is a symbol of her love for men which is the cause of the special excellence that we attest to in this devotion.

EVER IMMACULATE

The fecundity of the devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart, however, is not exhausted by the consideration of her heart as a symbol of love. We speak of the heart of Our Lady as being immaculate. In so doing we accept the usage of the word *heart* to signify the soul, and we refer to that unique privilege granted to Our Lady of being miraculously preserved from all stain of sin, her Immaculate Conception. Conceived without sin and full of grace, Mary also retained her immaculateness throughout her life. Never did sin, mortal or venial, tarnish the beauty of her grace-filled soul. Never did pride, impurity, anger, envy, hold sway in the soul of Mary. Ever the mirror of her Divine Son's holiness, Our Lady merits our veneration wherein we sing the praises of her Immaculate Conception and her sinless life.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary is a symbol of love; it also sig-

⁸ Friethoff, C., O.P. *De Incarnati Verbi Mysterio*. Vol. II, p. 356.

nifies her Immaculate Conception and her sinless life. These are special reasons for Mary's excellence which is manifested in her heart. Yet there are other reasons for her excellence; and these, too, are found in her heart as it designates her soul. St. John Eudes sees the heart of Mary as the throne of all virtues.

"The Holy Spirit, having considered the most sacred Virgin from the moment of her Immaculate Conception as the one chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of God, infused in her Heart the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity; the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude; and all the other virtues: religion, humility, obedience, patience, meekness, purity, etc. The Holy Spirit bestowed the excellence of the virtues in her virginal heart in a degree proportionate to the dignity and grace of the Mother of God."⁹

The litany of Our Lady's virtues has no parallel among the saints. Just as her exalted office far exceeds the vocation of all other creatures, so too the virtues adorning her soul are far superior to those of other creatures. Our Lady's heart, figuratively signifying her soul, manifests the height and depth of Mary's virtues.

SANCTUARY OF HUMAN PASSIONS

Finally we may consider, again with St. John Eudes, the heart of Mary as the sanctuary of the human passions. Since the irascible and concupiscible appetites, in which the passions are seated, are faculties dependent on soul and body, it is again the figurative use of the heart signifying the sensitive soul that is here utilized.

"... we must honor the very august Heart of the Mother of God, as the sanctuary of all passions, which human emotions were sanctified so excellently that they have been actuated only by the Holy Spirit, who possessed and animated them much more perfectly than human mind can conceive."¹⁰

The passions of Our Lady were always in complete control; never did they blind her reason. This does not mean that she suppressed her passions of love, hatred, sorrow, joy. Mary was a woman, perhaps the most sensitive of women, and during her life on earth, all her passions were given full freedom. Her emotions were strong and vigorous; and, guided by reason, they were a source of Our Lady's tender loving of good and terrible hatred of evil.

Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, then, is the venera-

⁹ *Meditations on Various Subjects*. p. 262. P. J. Kenedy & Sons. New York. 1947.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

tion of Mary, the Mother of God. Her heart symbolizes her intense love for us, her children. It speaks to us of her Immaculate Conception and spotless life. We see in her heart the perfection of all virtues and all passions. At Fatima Our Lady requested that devotion to her Immaculate Heart be established in the world. Her request is being fulfilled. Throughout Christendom the hearts of men are turning to the Heart of Mary. No wonder that Cardinal Cerejeira, Patriarch of Lisbon, could write in 1942: "We believe that the apparitions of Fatima open a new era, that of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. What has taken place in Portugal is of the miraculous order. It is the foreshadowing of what the Immaculate Heart of Mary is preparing for the world!"¹¹

¹¹ De Oca, Rev. V. Montes, C.S.Sp., *op. cit.*, p. 88.