

Homily for the Sunday Celebration of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Today, in a wonderful way, we celebrate as a parish the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – this special title of our Blessed Mother for which our parish is named. But why is this a title for Mary – her Immaculate Heart? Well certainly our Gospel today teaches us that Mary herself kept all of the events and mysteries of her Son’s life, and meditated on them in her heart. But what does St. Luke mean by “her heart”? Clearly, he wasn’t referring to the “beating chest organ protected by the rib cage”. Rather, he was using this word, “heart”, in a much more profound way.

In our culture today, we understand the heart as the deep center of a person’s innermost character, which includes things like their feelings and inclinations. In biblical language, the understanding of the heart went much deeper, though. In the Bible, the heart was understood to occupy the most important place in the human body, since this organ moved the rest of the body. Given its hiddenness, the heart therefore, also stood for those essential hidden aspects that move us: reason, the will, temperament, and emotions. In other words, the heart was the symbolization of the very fundamental essence of a person – the center of human life – where the intellectual, the emotional, and the moral aspects all converge and unite to form the person.

Therefore, to talk about Mary's Immaculate Heart is to see the promise of the Beatitudes fulfilled – “blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God”. In other words, since Mary was filled with God's grace and completely united to Jesus, her intellectual, emotional, and moral life totally belonged to God. So, for example, to ponder in her heart the event recorded in today's Gospel, Mary would not have beat up on herself for losing Jesus. She wouldn't have blamed Joseph. She wouldn't have punished Jesus for “sassing back” when He told her, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” Rather, she would have brought to God this whole scary and confusing experience of losing Jesus in the temple in order to see God's plan in this. For example, maybe she learned – like we need to learn – that it only takes a minute to lose Jesus, but 3 days to get Him back! Or maybe God taught Mary patience and perseverance in seeking Jesus. Or perhaps more about the deeper identity of her divine Son. The point is, that for the Church to teach about Mary's Immaculate Heart is to give us the example of bringing every part of our selves, every thing that happens to us, our very lives to God. And in doing this we are able to comprehend, feel, and live as God would have us live. Easy to say, hard to do – I know.

For this reason, Mary, as the mother of our brother and savior, Jesus Christ, continually reminds us of the need for conversion of heart, so that we might totally and entirely belong to God alone. For example, on June 13, 1917 in Fatima, Portugal, when the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to the three shepherd children, she told them: “Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart.” Now, why would Jesus want to do that? Because His goal in saving us is to bring every part and aspect of ourselves – our hearts – into conformity with His Father’s will. As Jesus says in the Scriptures, “the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart...” And Mary, herself a human creature like us provides the pre-eminent example of what it means to belong totally to God. And, believe me, we need a model such as her held up for us and our world today!

As a mother, Mary wants to teach us to love Jesus, the Church, and all people more and more. She, who gave Jesus His very body, wants to teach us to come before Him in the Blessed Sacrament, to love, worship, and adore, so that He might be in us and we in Him. She wants to teach us that seeking God’s will, no matter how we feel about it will bring us infinitely more peace and joy in this life and the next than we could ever manufacture ourselves.

My friends, Mary desires for us to love God, to love Jesus, and to love all with the perfect love that the Holy Spirit has cultivated within her. And, the more that we establish true devotion to her, in ways like praying the rosary and in asking for her intercession as we go throughout the day, the more our hearts will belong more completely to Jesus. God bless you.

From “Fatima: In Lucia’s Own Words – Sr. Lucia’s Memoirs”

June 13, 1917 (Fatima):

“Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart.”

“Don’t lose heart. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.”

July 13, 1979 (Fatima):

“In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph.”

In biblical language, the “heart” indicates the centre of human life, the point where reason, will, temperament and sensitivity converge, where the person finds his unity and his interior orientation. According to Matthew 5:8, the “immaculate heart” is a heart which, with God’s grace, has come to perfect interior unity and therefore “sees God”. To be “devoted” to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means therefore to embrace this attitude of heart, which makes the fiat—“your will be done”—the defining centre of one’s whole life. It might be objected that we should not place a human being between ourselves and Christ. But then we remember that Paul did not hesitate to say to his communities: “imitate me” (1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:17; 1 Th 1:6; 2 Th 3:7, 9). In the Apostle they could see concretely what it meant to follow Christ. But from whom might we better learn in every age than from the Mother of the Lord?

I would like finally to mention another key expression of the “secret” which has become justly famous: “my Immaculate Heart will triumph”. What does this mean? The Heart open to God, purified by contemplation of God, is stronger than guns and weapons of every kind. The fiat of Mary, the word of her heart, has changed the history of the world, because it brought the Saviour into the world—because, thanks to her Yes, God could become man in our world and remains so for all time. The Evil One has power in this world, as we see and experience continually; he has power because our freedom continually lets itself be led away from God. But since God himself took a human heart and has thus steered human freedom towards what is good, the freedom to choose evil no longer has the last word. From that time forth, the word that pre-233 vails is this: “In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). The message of Fatima invites us to trust in this promise.

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