

## **Sunday Celebration of the Patronal Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

As I shared last weekend at Masses, some two weeks ago, I was blessed to serve as a spiritual director on a pilgrimage to Lourdes and Fatima. When I first spoke the names of these two towns last week – Lourdes and Fatima – I imagine some of you were probably not familiar with the miraculous events that unfolded there. You might remember, then, that I unofficially assigned homework to look up and learn more about these two locations where our Blessed Mother actually appeared to young children, revealing to them important messages for the entire world – messages which desperately need to be heard in our time.

Well, as coincidence would have it – actually, I don't believe in coincidence. As *God*-incidence would have it, today we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It's also our patronal feast, since our parish is named in honor of Mary under this title. It's also the 98<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the three young children of Fatima, Portugal on June 13, 1917. Sister Lucia, one of the three young visionaries of Fatima wrote the following about that which happened 98 years ago today:

“As soon as Jacinta, Francisco and I had finished praying the Rosary, with a number of other people who were present, we saw once more the flash reflecting the light which was approaching (which we called lightning). The next moment, Our Lady was there on the holmoak [tree], exactly the same as in May... “I would like to ask you to take us to Heaven,” [Lucia asked]. “Yes. I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon [who in fact both died from the Spanish Flu within 3 years of the apparitions]. But you are to stay here some time longer. 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.”

“Am I to stay here alone?” I asked, sadly. “No, my daughter. Are you suffering a great deal? 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.” [Then, the Blessed Mother gave a sign, Lucia writes.] In front of the palm of Our Lady’s right hand was a heart encircled by thorns which pierced it. We understood that this was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, outraged by the sins of humanity, and seeking reparation.” See what I mean about God-incidences? Maybe you’ll really go home this time and research Fatima and Lourdes!

My brothers and sisters, as we celebrate this feast today, for which our parish is named, we call to mind the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. What does it mean to call Mary's heart "immaculate"? It means that her heart was so set on fire with love for God and for others that it was not tainted or stained with selfishness and sin – those things which are unquestionable obstacles to love. Therefore, she was perfectly united to her divine Son, Jesus. In a real way, we can say that their two hearts – His Sacred Heart and her Immaculate Heart – beat together. She is His mother. And although in His divinity He is truly God without beginning or end, His humanity comes from her. His flesh and blood come from hers.

It was this very flesh and blood that our Lord Jesus Christ offered up once for all in the perfect sacrifice on the cross of Calvary for our salvation. And every time Mass is celebrated, we enter in to the mystery of that one perfect sacrifice as His very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity are given to us under simple forms of bread and wine in Holy Communion. And because Mary is the mother of this Jesus, who comes to us in the holy Eucharist, we rightly call her, Mother of the Eucharist.

As we receive our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion, we must call to mind that His perfect sacrifice given to save us is a model for how we are to live our lives – in sacrificial love for God and for others. This is also the witness of Mary’s Immaculate Heart, which teaches us how to love aright – not by being selfish, or by using others for our gain, or by building walls around our hearts to keep others out; but, by being self-giving, and self-sacrificing, and seeking and accepting God’s will whatever it may be. Just look at the scene in today’s Gospel where Mary and Joseph “misplace” Jesus in their journey back from Jerusalem where they offered sacrifice at the Temple for the feast of Passover. Imagine how overwhelmed Mary must have been by losing her son for three days in the big city! Imagine how fear must have struck her heart that she had “lost” this child, who had come to save the world! But Mary, who did not understand why, “kept all these things in her heart.”

My friends, may our hearts be so consumed with love of God and others. And may the great sacrifice of love that we receive today and honor this week in our parish celebration of 40 Hours Eucharistic Devotions enable us to truly love as Mary loves. And may our hearts together beat in union with hers. God bless you.