

The Meaning of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Fr. Robert J. Fox wrote, “In all the world there has been only one human person who ever lived the Christ-life without flaw or fault. There has been only one woman upon this earth who, from the first moment of her existence until the last breath of her mortal body, was found to fulfill the will of God perfectly in every respect. At each moment she was ‘favored, full of grace,’ and each moment she grew in grace still more. The perfect correspondence of her will to the will of God has given the world a heart most pleasing to God and therefore a model for every Christian.” (p. 13 Immaculate Heart of Mary: True Devotion) That one person is Mary.

God promised in Gen. 3:15 that “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head while you strike at his heel.” From that moment on the world looked for the birth of the Woman and her Seed. As the first Adam and Eve had been without Original and Personal Sin until the first sin, so the new Adam and the new Eve would be without sin. They represented a second chance for all mankind to choose to reject sin and accept redemption. Because of this, the New Eve, Mary, was immaculately conceived. After her birth, she chose to remain without sin. Therefore, she is the pure, most holy, ever-virgin Mother of God. More than that, Mary’s Heart is immaculately created to be the temple of the all holy God, and daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit. This is according to the perfect plan of God, as He wills it, because He wills it. In her Immaculate Heart, God finds joy, built on the total self-gift, of Mary’s true, pure love of God. The Church recognizes this truth in Pope Pius IX’s proclamation on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception which has always been understood and taught in the Church. It states that, “The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.” (CCC. 490-491) The teaching on Mary’s Immaculate Heart is a reflection on the teaching on the Immaculate Conception.

Another term necessary to understanding the teachings on the Immaculate Heart is an understanding of the word heart. Biblically, the heart of a person symbolizes the total person, the soul, the intellect, the memory, the core of the being, the life force, the interior life, as well as the material and corporal heart. The material and corporal heart has been described as being, “...the principle of life, the first organ to begin to live and the last to be stilled in death; it is the seat of love, hatred, joy, sadness, fear and every passion of the soul.” (p. 8 Eudes) The spiritual heart is believed to contain the memory, intelligence, will and spirit. It is the heart that we share with God, being in His image and likeness, and share with angels. Scripture tells us that “From the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.” (Mt. 12:34, Lk. 6:45) and “A clean heart create for me, O God: renew in me a steadfast spirit.” (Ps. 51:12)

Another image seen throughout Scripture is God’s promise to give His people “a new heart and a new spirit...” (Ez. 11:19) “A clean heart...” (Ps. 51:12) “A heart that is constant and pure...” In many ways Mary is that new heart and new spirit, the only clean heart that is constant and pure, for her heart alone of all mankind is immaculate. For from the first moment of her existence, Mary’s heart cleaved unto God alone. Her heart was at peace for it rested in God. He is her all in all and because of this, her love remains pure and undefiled.

Like a sunflower turning toward the sun, Mary is constantly turned toward God from whom she draws all light and life. Beneath her heart, God the Son dwelt in her womb, being nourished by her body, while at the same time nourishing His Mother Mary. Even now, she continues to draw her nourishment from His Sacred heart, which is Eucharist. She then draws us through her heart to His Sacred Heart.

In Luke 1:28 we are told that Mary is full of grace. These are God's words through the angel. If a person is filled with something or someone, there cannot be room for anything else. Mary, being filled with grace, had no room in her heart for sin, or for anything that would distract her from the source of all grace, God. This therefore reflects the purity of Mary's Heart, what we call her Immaculate Heart.

As we continue through Luke, we find that Mary's Heart is to be cut open. "...and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thought of many hearts may be revealed." (Lk. 2:35), it is a heart pondering the word of God and keeping it within her heart. (Lk. 2:51) While still a girl, she was fully imbued with the Word of God in the Old Testament, only to be filled with the Word of God in her womb and then filled with the Word of God in the proclamation of the Gospel in the New Covenant, i.e., the New Testament. It is through the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that God totally fulfills His promise in Ezekiel, "'I will sprinkle clean water upon you and cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts.'" (Ez. 36:25-26) The heart of mankind had become hardened by sin, and it is through the birth of the Incarnate Word of God that the heart of mankind is replaced with the Sacred Heart of Jesus born of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Another meaning of for heart in Scripture and in our culture is to use it to symbolize or express the great love of a person. Mary's great love is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So united with God, His Will, His love, is Mary, that that her Heart has become molded in His image, the image of the Sacred Heart. She is the Mother of He who came before. "Jesus lived in her soul and in her body, and in each faculty of her body and soul...His Heart abides in her heart, His soul in her soul, His spirit in her spirit...His passion became her passion..." (Eudes, p. 25)

Given Mary's perfect response to the gifts she received, It is not surprising that our Lord Jesus Christ wishes for us to return her gift to God by giving Mary our love and devotion. Before His heart was pierced, fulfilling the prophecy of Simeon, "...and a sword shall pierce your heart..." Jesus gave us His Mother to be our Mother, placing us in her wounded Immaculate Heart.

What do we mean when we speak of Mary's Immaculate Heart? It is a heart overflowing with love. Hers is a heart that reflects the grace of God, which is then showered upon her children. The Immaculate Heart compassionates the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her heart vibrates with each gentle stroke of God echoing the heavenly music of His glory, which she sounds down to all generations in her love and praise of God. Drawing us to imitate her song of praise, our Lady calls us to lift our eyes to Heaven. According to Fr. Fox "For all other hearts to become pleasing to God, somehow they must sing in harmony with the heart

of our Mother, so that Christ may be formed in them as the Word was first formed in her heart.” (Ibid., p. 14)

Constantly listening for the call of the Beloved, Mary’s heart ponders the eternal mysteries of God. Which St. John Eudes described when he wrote, “The heart of the Mother of God is a world of marvels, an abyss of wonders, the source and principle of all the virtues which we admire in our glorious Queen.” (p. 5 The Admirable Heart of Mary). From this heart, Mary’s virtues radiate to the entire world. Her gentle humility is a white light that reflects all truth. Her purity like a fresh spring rain that produces fruit in seeds buried deep in the soil of human flesh. Her rich charity that gives life’s blood to hearts hardened by sin, seemingly dead to the love of God and others. These virtues are graces poured down upon Mary’s heart from our Triune God and then generously distributed to all who are open to her maternal love. Hers’ is a heart that is constantly seeking the wisdom of God and as a result is “peaceable, lenient, docile, rich in sympathy and the kindly deeds that are its fruit, impartial and sincere.” (James 3:16) When we come to this devotion, we are coming into “...full Christian maturity. It is opening ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit within us.” (Fox, p. 33) Drawing from the graces we have received in the Sacraments, Mary aids us in discovering the wonderful treasured of our God. For as the truest and best of all mothers, the Immaculate Mother of God, does not leave us in our devotion to her, but carries us to a greater love and worship of our Lord and God and in this alone is our peace.

Our Lady, seat of Wisdom...Pray for us.

Immaculate and Sorrowful Heart of Mary....Pray for us.

Work Cited

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