



*Devotion to the Immaculate and Sorrowful Heart of Mary
according to Father Masmítja,
founder of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

Wednesday, June 19, 2019

The Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary

Explaining the parts of our habit is a popular topic. If there are small children present, I like to ask, “How many sets of beads are there on my rosary?” Young voices quickly shout out, “Seven!”. “How many beads are in each set of seven?” “Seven!” The older crowd usually comment, “I didn’t notice.” But it’s the little ones that are waist high that get to work counting while I’m talking about something else that, to them, is not as interesting or important.

The focus of our Novena tonight brings us to one of the unique features of our Community. Since we are the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, most people know that we are devoted to Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart. However, what escapes many is our devotion to the Sorrowful Heart of Mary. Fr. Joachim Masmítja chose to combine these two devotions when he founded the Sisters in 1848.

The badge the Sisters wear is the image of the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart specifically designed by Fr. Masmítja. When a group of our Sisters traveled to Spain to celebrate the 150 anniversary of our original foundation, they found this symbol carved in an altar and the doors of the early convents.

The image of the Immaculate Heart pierced by a sword takes us to the Gospel story of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple. We read in the second chapter of St. Luke:





“When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they [Joseph and Mary] took him [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,’ and to offer the sacrifice of ‘a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,’ in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.” (Lk 2:22-24)

The Holy Family encounters the holy old man Simeon in the Temple. After praising God, Simeon then turns to Mary and says:

“Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Lk 2: 34-35).

The image of Our Lady of Sorrows traditionally features either one sword or seven swords piercing her heart. These seven swords represent seven instances in the gospel when Mary’s heart was pierced as she cooperated with her Son’s work of redemption (hence the seven sets of seven on our Rosary – the Rosary of the Seven Dolors or Sorrows of Mary):

1. The Prophecy of Simeon
2. The Flight into Egypt
3. The Loss of the Child Jesus for Three Days
4. Mary meets Jesus as he carries the cross
5. Mary stands at the foot of the cross
6. Mary receives the dead body of Jesus
7. Mary witnesses the burial of Jesus

Fr. Masmijtja was very familiar with the devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. “He had often heard of the Heart of Mary in the context of the devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. His father, Francis Masmijtja, was an active member of the association of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Third Order of the Servites.... Fr.



Masmitja himself was appointed chaplain of the association by the Provincial of the Servites.” (Lozano, 47).

For those who are unfamiliar with the Order of Servites, they were the fifth mendicant order, founded in 1233. The aim of the Servites is the sanctification of its members, preaching the Gospel, and the propagation of devotion to the Mother of God, with special reference to her sorrows.

It is no surprise that, in founding a religious order, Fr. Masmitja would continue to draw on and include his devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. What is unique is that he combines this devotion to the devotion of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Why? To answer this question, we leave Spain and travel to Paris.

In 1836, the pastor of Our Lady of Victory parish was troubled over the religious indifference existing amongst his parishioners. “From [his rectory], in the heart of one of the middle-class sectors of the city, he watched people as they daily rushed past his empty church without paying it the slightest heed. Agnosticism was their watchword and business their new religion. Since all his other efforts were in vain, during the celebration of the Eucharist on December 3, he was inspired with the idea of consecrating his parish to the Heart of Our Lady. Some days later, he established an association to invoke the intercession of the Immaculate Heart for the conversion of sinners. The result exceeded his greatest expectations. His church became not only one of the most frequented in Paris, but also one of the most vital centers of piety in the world.” (Lozano, 43) Two years later, in 1838 Pope Gregory XVI approved the association as an Archconfraternity, and the pastor began publishing a series of annals describing the incredible growth of the Archconfraternity throughout the world, as well recounting the many and seemingly impossible conversions that were being obtained through the prayers of its members.

Fr. Masmitja, in his Forward to the Constitutions written in 1852, explains the connection to the Archconfraternity and the apostolic aim of the community:



“Divine Providence, moved by the miseries of men and the loss of many souls, inspired in the Church of Our Lady of Victory in Paris, the foundation of the Archconfraternity of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary. This association was established to bring men under her protection, and through her merits, to draw them to her divine Son, Jesus, and the adorable Trinity, in order to obtain from the Divine Mercy, the conversion of sinners.” (Lozano 43-44)

“Influenced by this devotion to the Sorrows of Mary, Fr. Masmitja gave his Sisters a rule of life inspired by the constitutions of the Servants of Mary, the feminine branch of the Servites.” (Lozano, 13) In the Forward to his Constitutions, Fr. Masmitja refers to the connection to the Servite constitutions, but also the intrinsic difference in the institute he has established:

“The purpose of the Order of the Servants of Mary is to honor the Blessed Mother by contemplating the Sorrows she suffered during the life, passion and death of her divine Son, while the new Institute meditates on the cruel sword of sorrow that pierces this Heart at the sight of sinners renewing the passion and death of her Son and despising the merits of the blood shed for them with so much love. It seeks especially through prayers and other pious practices, to obtain from the Divine Mercy an interior grace for sinners, so that, abandoning the state of sin, they will turn to God, the center of all happiness.” (Lozano, 50)

“Thus, when Fr. Masmitja decided to dedicate the new Community to the Heart of Mary, he recalled the devotion to the Sorrows, giving it an apostolic nuance: The Sisters would meditate on an eighth sword that pierces the Heart of Mary at the sight of sins. However, instead of committing themselves to reparation for sins, as other communities did, the Sisters would attack the roots of the evil by praying for the conversion of sinners and by working for the evangelization of society.” (Lozano, 50)

In founding the new religious institute, Fr. Masmitja declared in his Memoirs that he chose seven women from among many who came to him for spiritual direction to form the first group in honor of the seven swords which pierced the Heart of Mary. (Lozano, 23) These seven Sisters began living community



life on the feast of the Sorrows of Mary in 1848. He asked the Sisters to wear a habit of violet color and a cincture with the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows attached.

I'd like to bring out two other Marian events that I believe have special significance.

The first occurred only two years before the foundation of the community in the French Alps. The date is Saturday, September 19, 1846. The same prevailing attitudes of the times were found here as in Paris - fewer and fewer went to Sunday Mass, the Sacraments, prayer and the faith were widely neglected. Two poor children, Maximin and Melanie were out on the mountain in the middle of the afternoon with the cows. The children see a brilliant light, vibrant and outshining the sun. "As they watched, the splendor of the light intensified, dazzlingly. They were puzzled and fear stricken and were about to flee when they observed that the luminous circle was opening. Gradually they could make out, ever more sharply defined, the figure of a woman. She was seated, her face in her hands, in an attitude of sorrow, weeping. Slowly, with unearthly grace, she arose. With her arms crossed on her breast and her head somewhat inclined, she confronted them.... The children heard the woman speak in a voice both commanding and reassuring. 'Come to me, my children. Do not be afraid. I am here to tell you something of the greatest importance.... If my people will not obey, I shall be compelled to loose my Son's arm. It is so heavy, so pressing that I can no longer restrain it. How long I have suffered for you!'" (Kennedy, 92-93) The children could see the tears on the Lady's cheeks. The Lady enumerated some of the offences including working on Sunday, swearing using her Son's name, ignoring Lenten practices, and attending Mass only to ridicule the faith. She told of future crop failures and famine if the people would not convert. At the end, "the woman looked earnestly at them, 'My children,' she charged them, 'you will make this known to all my people.' Slowly she turned away, glided along the ravine, paused...and repeated the command.... She stood still for a moment, then rose into the air. They saw her look toward heaven, joy in her face and her tears at an end. She glanced solicitously out over the world.... She faded into the air." (Kennedy, 95-96)



As in other Marian apparitions, what followed was a long time of questioning of the two seers in order to expose any deceit or trickery. At the same time the faithful were converted. “Violation of the Sunday rest ceased to be the common practice. Regularly present now at Mass were people who had been missing it for years. Long lines waited before the confessional, and the communion rail was unaccustomedly thronged. Holidays which once had been religious in nature and observance, but in later years had been no more than occasion for scandalous drinking and carousing, reacquired their original character.” (Kennedy, 100) In 1851, After years of investigation, at least 23 miraculous cures from a spring at the site, and a multitude of conversions, the apparition of Our Lady of La Salette was approved as authentic. Pilgrims continued to come. Hardened sinners who had long ceased to practice their religion, and even scoffed at it, experienced in this place an overwhelming pull toward the Sacrament of Confession. Our Lady of La Salette was hailed by the title “Reconciler of Sinners”. (Kennedy, 110)

Now we look forward to the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima in 1917. On the 13 of June Mary tells the children that Our Lord “wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart” and “My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.” To quote Lucia: “As Our Lady spoke these last words, she opened her hands...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.” (Santos, 160-161)

On July 13, after the vision of hell, Our Lady said to the children: “You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace...” (Santos, 162).

In the August apparition, Lucia writes: “Then, looking very sad, Our Lady said: ‘Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners; for many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them.’” (Santos, 167). During the October 13 apparition Lucia recounts:



“Looking very sad, Our Lady said, ‘Do not offend the Lord our God any more, because He is already so much offended.’” (Santos, 168). Both times she observes that Our Lady looked “very sad”. With that look was the appeal for the conversion of sinners so that they will not go to hell or offend the Lord our God.

In the union of the devotions of the Immaculate and the Sorrowful Heart of Mary, two different aspects of Our Lady’s Heart are brought forward. Her Immaculate Heart describes the state of Our Lady’s Heart. In God’s Divine Plan, she was, from the first moment of her existence, without sin. She does not suffer from the effects of our fallen nature. She loves totally, purely. We are called to imitate that love. A love of total self-gift, of obedience. A love that does not wish to offend the Beloved. A love that is pure, free from self-interest, personal agendas, or ego. An Immaculate Heart is totally given, undivided, all for the Beloved. The immense love of Mary for God and us is beautifully described by St. Alphonsus Liguori:

"Think of what the saints have done for their neighbor because they loved God. But what saint's love for God can match Mary's? She loved Him more in the first moment of her existence than all the saints and angels who ever loved Him or will love Him. Just as there is not one among all the Blessed who loves God as Mary does, so there is no one, after God, who loves us as much as this most loving mother does. Furthermore, if we heaped together all the love that mothers have for their children, all the love of husbands and wives, all the love of all the angels and saints for their clients, it could never equal Mary's love for even a single soul." (Hopler)

Her Sorrowful Heart shows us how sin affect her heart. Her heart was not created sorrowful. The depth of her sorrow is a result of her heart being immaculate. Because she loves more than we can ever imagine, she also can suffer more than we can imagine. Mary is the Queen of Martyrs because she suffered in her soul all that her Son endured in His Body. St. Lawrence Justinian wrote that “the heart of Mary became, as it were, a mirror of the Passion of the Son, in which might be seen,



faithfully reflected, the spitting, the blows and the wounds, and all that Jesus suffered.”

Saint Bonaventure also remarks that “those wounds which were scattered over the body of our Lord were all united in the single heart of Mary.” (Liguori, 410)

Why did Mary weep at La Salette? It was not because she is the Queen of Martyrs. Her sorrow is not about her own sufferings, even though she said that she had suffered much. Why was she “very sad” at Fatima? What reasons did Lucia give us? She is sad because the Good Lord is greatly offended and many sinners are going to hell because no one will pray and sacrifice for them. Seeing the Lord who she loves more than the saints and angels offended, seeing her children whom she loves with a love greater than the love of all mothers combined being lost for all eternity – this is why she weeps. Fr. Masmijtja called it the eighth sword, “the cruel sword of sorrow that pierces this Heart at the sight of sinners renewing the passion and death of her Son and despising the merits of the blood shed for them with so much love.” (Lozano, 50)

At the end of Mel Gibson’s film, *The Passion of the Christ* is the powerful image of Mary holding the dead body of her Son. There are no words. She stares out at the audience. The subtext: See what He suffered for you. What is your response?



Bibliography

Hopler, Whitney. "Inspirational Quotes About the Virgin Mary and Miracles." Learn Religions, Apr. 17, 2019, [learnreligions.com/inspirational-quotes-about-the-virgin-mary-124610](https://www.learnreligions.com/inspirational-quotes-about-the-virgin-mary-124610).

Kennedy, Msgr. John S., "The Lady in Tears", A Woman Clothed with the Sun: Eight Great Appearances of Our Lady, ed John Delaney, Image Books, 1961.

Liguori, St. Alphonsus Maria De, The Glories of Mary, 1852.

Lozano, Juan Manuel, The Immaculate Heart Sisters: A Historical and Doctrinal Study on their Mission and Spirit in the Church, Tucson, 1974.

Santos, Sr. Lucia, Fatima in Lucia's own Words, edited by Fr. Louis Kondor, SVD, Fatima, 8th ed, Fatima, 1989.

The Bible, New American Revised Edition, 2011.