

Novena to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart - 31 August to 8 September 2019

OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART: MOTHER-DISCIPLE

Day 5: Wednesday, 04 September – in the 22nd week in Ordinary Time

- 1 Col 1:1-8 “The Good News which has reached you is spreading all over the world and producing the same results as it has among you ...”
- Ps 51:10-11 “I trust in the kindness of God forever”
- Lk 4:38-44 “I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do. And he continued his preaching...’

OLSH AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART

Welcome to day 5! We are now at the middle of our Novena and today in the gospel reading, we see Jesus healing and preaching, going around proclaiming the Kingdom of God with his words and his deeds, not staying in one place but moving from one town to the next! Where is his mother Mary in these scenes? Where was his mother during his public ministry?

Let us look at what the Gospels say, particularly the synoptics – Matthew, Mark and Luke. These Gospels show that during his public ministry, Jesus was not based in Nazareth, he was based in Capernaum. He left home but during those years there were times when he returned to Nazareth, the village where he grew up. In those instances, we meet his family. In Mark chapter 3, verses 19-20 we read - “Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’” While Jesus was teaching, “his mother and his brothers came; (verses 31 to 35) and standing outside, they sent for him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.’ And he replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking around those who sat around him he said ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’” This story has parallels in Matthew (12:46-50) and in Luke (8:19-21).

What can we deduce from this story? It seems to show that when Jesus left home, his mother and other members of their household did not follow him. They stayed home, in Nazareth and from there they heard stories about him and his activities. The scholars who wrote *Mary in the New Testament* say “Historically, there is no evidence that the closest members of Jesus’ natural family were active disciples during his ministry.” The evangelist Mark even seems to say that Mary and other members of their household did not only “not follow Jesus around”, they even wanted to stop him.

What I see in this is the portrait of a concerned mother. Jesus was going around preaching and healing and as more and more people started to follow him, some people, especially the more powerful ones, were turning against him. They were saying he was out of his mind, that he has an unclean spirit in him. His mother must have sensed that her son was in danger. And she sensed rightly for we know that in fact, Jesus was later arrested and put to death. Her concern was justified. Like any mother, she wanted to restrain him, bring him back home, protect him from those who were against him. Even if she was his mother, I believe she also had to grow in her understanding and acceptance of her son’s identity and mission and I imagine that this was not an easy journey, that this was in fact a painful journey for her.

At the end, we know from yesterday's reflection that she came to full faith in him. She became an active member of the post-Easter community of Jesus' disciples. In this sense then, she is a model of discipleship for us...we who are post-Easter believers and disciples of Christ. St Paul wrote to the Colossians saying "the Good News which has reached you is spreading all over the world and producing the same results as it has among you." Mary, the mother of Jesus, was part of the first community who shared this Good News! This Good News that eventually reached Paul and later us...this same Good News that we are called to share with the next generation of men and women in our world. The first believers, ourselves, and the future believers who at this time have not yet been born...are we not all equally disciples of Christ? What did Jesus say? "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

In the life of Mary, we see many ways of doing the will of God. In the different stages of her life, she lived her discipleship in different ways. As a young mother, she expressed her discipleship in the love and care she gave to Jesus as he was growing up. Later, she lived her discipleship in the struggle to understand and accept her Son's mission even as she tried to protect him. In her older years, she expressed her discipleship in preaching the Risen Lord in the community of believing disciples.

The courageous missionary in Venezuela, the teenager in Cork struggling to follow the gospel values, the hardworking loving parent, the persevering employee in the workplace, the joyful retired person in the nursing home...are we not all equally disciples of Christ?

Jesus in today's gospel says "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do." As his disciples, this is also what we are sent to do. As people who come to this Parish of the Sacred Heart, we are exhorted to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God in a particular way – the particular way by which we see Jesus is a gift that we have received, we call this our CHARISM. The way of life we are called to live is our SPIRITUALITY. The mandate to share with people we encounter the unconditional love of God is our MISSION. As Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and lay people associated with our religious family – we have a charism, spirituality and mission. Our charism is knowing Jesus as the love of God made flesh, the face of the Father's mercy. This is who Jesus is for us. Our spirituality is the Spirituality of the Heart, a way of living compassionately. And our mission is to be the heart of God on earth, here and now.

Mary, under the title, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, is an essential component of our Spirituality of the Heart. For Fr Jules Chevalier, our Founder, gave her this special title. How did Fr Jules come up with this title for Mary? He did not have an apparition. Mary did not appear to him telling him to give her that name. No, this title came from Fr Chevalier's prayerful reflection on Scripture. Something like what we have been doing in these days of the Novena. In his prayerful reflection on Scripture, he saw that special and strong bond of love between Jesus and Mary. In naming Mary Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Fr Jules also wanted to capture the truth that we are called into this relationship of love.

As we continue with this Novena, may we experience this love that binds Mary to Jesus more and more and realise that it is this same love that binds us to each other. So, let us live in this love, from now till we meet again tomorrow!