

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

OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART: MOTHER-DISCIPLE

Day 7: Friday, 06 September – in the 22nd week in Ordinary Time

- 1 Col 1:15-20 – Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God...
- Ps 99 – Come with joy in the presence of the Lord
- Lk 5:33-39 – new wine, new wineskins

LOVE THAT CALLS US TO PRAYER AND ACTION

Welcome to day 7! Yesterday, we have started to look at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart more specifically. I gave you two points – Gratitude and Focus on Jesus.

First, we saw that the reason behind this new title is gratitude! When we call Mary by this title, we keep Jules Chevalier's gratitude alive and we make it our own, making us grateful and joyful people. Today's psalm then becomes our song - "Cry out with joy to the Lord all the earth...go within his gates giving thanks..." (Ps 99) Ronald Rolheiser calls "the sense that all is gift" as the "first and most important virtue of all"¹ and that this "virtue" is concretely practiced in "receiving" rather than "taking." *Receive*. This word...is meant to mandate an entire way of living, wherein we are asked to acknowledge always, by the very way we receive everything, that everything is gift and that nothing comes to us as owed (102)." - GRATITUDE

Second, we saw that in the images of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the focus is Jesus, Jesus, who in Paul's words, is "the image of the unseen God," the love of God made flesh. Our Lady of the Sacred Heart is one who always directs us to Jesus, points us to him, and takes us to His Heart! – FOCUS ON JESUS

This brings me to my third point - This love of God made flesh in Jesus, what kind of love is it? It is a very concrete and practical love - a love that brings good news to the poor, proclaims liberty to captives, gives new sight to the blind, sets the downtrodden free...It is a love that associates with the lowly ones and compels us to compassionate action for justice! A love that sees that they have no wine and acts! Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart is one that not only calls us to prayer, it also calls us to action! – PRAYER & ACTION

Fr Chevalier promoted Our Lady of the Sacred Heart as intercessor and dispenser of graces. As intercessor, she brings all our requests and prayers to Jesus. As dispenser, she distributes the graces of Jesus' Heart to us. Chevalier was a man of his time and in his time, this was the language and the focus. For us today, I am proposing a different focus and this is to look at Our Lady of Sacred Heart not so much as intercessor – dispenser of graces but as Mother-Disciple.

I am not saying that she is not intercessor because she is. I am also not saying that she is not dispenser of God's graces. That is God's prerogative. I believe God can and does dispense his graces through Mary and through other channels. What I am proposing is a change of focus in the way we look at and relate with Mary. Today's gospel tells us that new wine must be

¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Our One Great Act of Fidelity*, page 98

put in new wineskins otherwise the old skins will burst and all will be wasted! Our world has changed. The context of Jules Chevalier's life is different from ours today. What Jules Chevalier called devotion, we now understand more fully as a spirituality. I am personally convinced that our Spirituality of the Heart demands of us active participation in the building of God's kingdom of justice and compassion. When we limit ourselves to seeing Mary as intercessor and dispenser of graces, we can excuse ourselves and put the burden on Mary's shoulders. What do I mean? I see a situation in front of me, for example, there is a flood and my neighbours are in danger. I get on my knees and ask for Mary's intercession, Mary please help them! I look out my window again and I see the water going up and I return to Mary, please pray for them, ask Jesus to help them, and I keep on doing this sincerely...and they drown! This is an exaggeration of course but it makes my point clear – relating to at Our Lady simply as intercessor and dispenser of graces may not be enough because it might not compel us to action when it is action that is called for.

So I am proposing to see her as Mother-Disciple. As we have established in the first 5 days of this Novena, this is her historical and biblical portrait. Second, I believe that seeing her as Mother-Disciple has the potential of compelling us to action. As Mother, we hear her in Cana drawing our attention to those who have no wine, she tells us to go to Jesus and do whatever he tells us. As disciple, we see her in the community of believing disciples modelling for us what it means to hear the word of God and act on it. As Mother-Disciple she tells us to follow Christ as she did and accompanies us in our discipleship. She is still hope of the hopeless because she tells us that something can be done, that there is nothing impossible with God. Her message is always, listen to Jesus (Prayer) then do whatever he tells you (action)!

So how do we now make our devotion into a living spirituality? One of the former MSC superiors general, Fr Eugene Cuskelly, talks about four movements in a spirituality of the heart. I see in these “four movements” a practical guide in living a spirituality of the heart. Allow me to share them with you.

- First movement - *We go down to the depths of our own hearts and there we see our profound need of life, love and meaning* (**awareness** – this requires of us times of silence in order to get in touch with the sentiments of our own hearts);
- Second movement - *We go to the Heart of Christ and there find the answer to our own questioning* (**encounter** – this requires of us prayerful reflection on Scripture. Remember, the object of our faith is not a set of principles, it is a person, the person of Jesus – essential to heart spirituality is a personal encounter with the person Jesus);
- Third movement - *We allow our hearts to be fashioned by the Heart of Christ* (**formation**). *Our own heart will become an understanding heart, open to, feeling for, and giving to our brothers and sisters in Christ;* (This movement asks of us a constant openness to becoming more and more like Christ. Formation is not a once and for all thing, it is meant to be ongoing); and
- The fourth movement - *We follow Christ who loved with a human heart* (**mission**). *Rooted in his love, we are not dis-heartened or discouraged in the face of difficulties.* Heart spirituality leads us to others. Having awareness and encountering Christ is only the beginning. We need formation, not for own selves and not for its own sake, formation is for mission.

In summary – Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart calls us to **gratitude**, to **focus our eyes on Jesus**, and to **prayer and action**. For our devotion to become a living spirituality, we are invited to an ongoing process of **awareness, encounter, formation and mission**.

Let me end today's reflection with a little story. A few years ago now, I attended a book launching of Cardinal Kasper in one of the bookstores in Rome. He shared with us a message from Pope John Paul II and a message from Pope Francis. He said, Pope John Paul II told us to open our hearts and to let Jesus in. Now Pope Francis tells us to open our hearts and let Jesus out!

With Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Mother-Disciple of Jesus as our companion and model, let us open our hearts and let Jesus in (awareness, encounter, formation). But let us not keep him there, let then open our hearts and let Jesus out - to the margins, the poor, those who need his compassion most (mission).

Second Image of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart
Courtyard of the Chevalier Center
Issoudun, France

