

Meditations: Immaculate Heart of Mary

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on this feast of Mary's Immaculate Heart, celebrated on the day after the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

- Mary, dwelling place of the Holy Spirit
- Blessed are the pure in heart
- Keeping everything in our heart

I WILL greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation (Is 61:10). The Church applies these words to Mary. After contemplating the breadth and depth of the love in the Heart of Jesus, we turn our eyes to the heart of his Mother. In order to prepare “a worthy dwelling place for the Holy Spirit,”^[1] God filled our Lady’s heart with countless graces and clothed it with purity.

Saint Ephrem said that “Mary was made a heaven in our favor, when she bore the divinity that Christ, without abandoning the glory of the Father, enclosed within the narrow limits of her womb, in order to lead men to a greater dignity.”^[2] By letting herself be inundated with grace, Mary, in a certain sense, becomes a heaven, the light and glory of God. Our Mother is so joyful and serene because divine love embraces every

corner of her heart. Our Lady's life contains a greatness that makes her exclaim with joy: *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior . . . all generations will call me blessed (Lk 1:46-48).*

We can join in that choir of all generations that rejoices to see what grace has brought about in the heart of Mary. At the same time, we want to join in our Mother's joy. We too would like to sing our "Magnificat" as we remember what God has brought about in our own lives, how He has wanted to enter into our hearts too with his glory. We can unite ourselves to the prayer that the Church addresses to God through our Lady's intercession in the Collect Prayer today: "Graciously grant that through her intercession we may be a worthy temple of your glory."^[3]

BLESSED ARE the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Mt 5:8), Mary's Son will one day say. Our Lady received the gift of seeing God made man from his earliest infancy. Her pure look was able to understand the look of Jesus, and even intuit many of his sentiments and intentions. In Cana, for example, after his first negative reply, Mary intuits her Son's willingness to advance his manifestation as the Messiah. And at the Cross, Mary sees in her Son's look the gentle request not to leave Him in those moments.

The clean untroubled look of our Lady leads her to discover God's hand behind all the great and small events in her life. This was the source of her constant joy. Purity of heart enables a person to see clearly, to penetrate to the intimate depth of things, because one sees that everything has its origin and goal in God. In contrast, when a person's

eyes lack innocence, when one fails to open oneself to this gift of God, it is easy to get caught up in appearances and superficial concerns.

A pure heart truly understands people, and tries not to classify or put labels on them; hence it finds it easy to love them sincerely. Purity doesn't distance us from people; on the contrary, we learn to look at everyone as daughters and sons of God who deserve to be treated with the greatest dignity. It leads us to love those by our side with a much greater and better love. A love like that of the Mother of Jesus discovers ways to show affection even in the most trying situations: "Mary knew how to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love."^[4]

“BUT DON’T FORGET: if God exalted his Mother, it is equally true that he did not spare her pain, exhaustion in her work, or trials of her faith.”^[5] In the scene of the Child Jesus lost in the Temple, we find one of those moments of trial. The anguish over not knowing where He had gone was later joined by the bewilderment over her Son’s words: *How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?* (Lk 2:49).

We cannot pretend to grasp all the designs in Jesus’ Heart. In the lives of those who follow Him closely, even in his own Mother’s life, there are moments when God surprises us, as though He wants to remind us that He always has something greater in mind than our own plans. It is consoling to think that our Lady also went through such experiences. Holy Scripture has no qualms about saying that Mary and Joseph did not

understand Jesus' response. However it adds: *his mother kept all these things in her heart (Lk 2:51).*

Knowing that God's hand is behind everything does not imply that we understand right away and in depth each of his plans. In one's life of prayer moments of darkness can arise when our Lord asks for our trust, for the mature faith that illuminates times of trial. Mary knew that the Holy Spirit dwelt in her heart. So that was the right place to keep and love, although sometimes with sorrow, the circumstances that she would come to understand better over time. And following the example and with the help of our Mother, we can do the same.

^[1] Roman Missal, Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Opening Prayer.

^[2] Saint Ephrem, *Sermo 3 de diversis: Opera omnia, III syr. et lat. Romæ* 1743, 607, quoted in the Office of readings for the memorial of Our Lady of Fatima.

^[3] Roman Missal, Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Collect Prayer.

^[4] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 286.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 172.