

## **Feast of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary + 2021**

**It should be no surprise** to any of us when I say that we are not angels! We are flesh and blood creatures. We think, imagine and communicate in this incarnate world through material signs that point to realities and truths beyond themselves. Such tangible signs and symbols speak to us and we speak through them, not just about ordinary things but about extraordinary truths that sometimes even words cannot capture.

**Since this is true in ordinary discourse** it is even more profoundly true when we engage our religious imagination. As a liturgical people the use of the language of sign and symbol is foundational for creating prayers, sharing reflections, exercising devotions and making meaning.

**How could we approach mystery** without bread, wine, flame, oil, incense, gesture, and poetry? Our sacramental rituals and our communal prayers would suffer a terrible poverty, and our probing of the divine would be without color or beauty or spirit.

**On this feast when we honor** the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary we speak tenderly of one of the touchstones of our Christian spirituality, the human heart. Our ordinary conversations are filled with references to the heart: heartfelt sympathy; for heaven's sake, have a heart; we need to have a heart to heart chat; you have a heart of gold; I think my heart is in the right place. None of these phrases are really comments about the physical organ we all have, but about something deeper, maybe elusive but understandable, - all making reference to that wonderfully complex side of our human nature.

**The scriptures are filled with heart references:** harden not your heart; the Lord looks into the heart; I will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh; Mary pondered all these things in her heart; love God with your whole heart; blessed are the pure of heart.

**These expressions** allow us to explore a deeper level of relationship with the person who speaks, or the person who is spoken about. This is so easy for us to grasp that we are very much at home with the phrase "The Sacred Heart of Jesus" and the "Immaculate Heart of Mary". Both phrases are pregnant with meaning for us, and our imagination allows for an astonishing breadth of insight and affection.

**Artists and poets** have given us a number of symbols attached to the hearts of Jesus and Mary: a cross, a sword, a ring of fire or a single flame, a wounded heart with a crown of thorns, - and in every one of these depictions we grasp the single most remarkable trait of the heart: the heart is the origin, the source and the habitus of love. **We can no more imagine** love without a heart, or a God without love. It is this truth that lies at the “heart” of discipleship. Jesus could have simply said, to be a disciple “have a heart”.

**In December 2001**, the Congregation for Divine Liturgy and the Discipline of the Sacraments published a document called “Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy”. One of the key principles in that document was to state that all devotion is rooted in the liturgy and takes its cue from the purpose of the liturgy.

**One of the purposes of the liturgy** is to send us forth to be disciples, to commission us to be Christ-like in all things. This means that our devotions, like to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or the Immaculate Heart of Mary are ultimately intended to be more than a pious moment. They are mission moments. They call us to cry out where love is missing, where people are mocked or marginalized, where hospitality is withheld, where children are abused, when justice is not done and mercy is not given.

**I do not know why Mother Clara** chose this title for the community of women religious she founded; but I think I’d be safe in saying, judging from her work and her spirit, that it wasn’t to form quiet witnesses to the love of God in the world. **Her tenacity** was that of Jesus who never failed to call out those who reserved their attention for the few and pious; **her unbending determination** to do God’s will was a loud and sustained echo of Mary’s fiat.

**In his sermon** The Heart of Christ, Msgr. Ronald Knox wrote: “A sacred heart is the treasury of splendid and noble thoughts”. It was the heart of Jesus that raged in driving the merchants out of the Temple; the heart that loved the rich young man; it was the Father’s heart that forgave the prodigal Son; the Virgin’s heart that gave us incarnate love.

There is no picture or statue or poem on earth that can portray such divine beauty and human wonder. Only the hearts of disciples can do that. To all the daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for being those disciples!

*Phil Horrigan*