

The Heart of Mary

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

INFO SSCC Brothers N° 69 – MAY 7, 2013

**May you have only one heart and one soul
and may you be as happy as you can be
when you are in the service
of the divine Hearts
of Jesus and Mary.**

Letter of the Good Father to Félix Cummins
February 4, 1824

Our Lady of Peace,
Generalate,
Rome

Woman, what have I to do with you?" (Jn. 2:4). Jesus' question to his mother touches directly on the reason for our Congregation's existence. The Good Father would say, "The consecration to the Sacred Hearts is the foundation of our institute." He didn't speak only of the heart of Jesus but of the hearts of Jesus **and** Mary. The connection between the two is of particular interest. What goes on between the heart of Jesus and the heart of Mary? What does one have to do with the other?



John's Gospel shows the mother of Jesus principally associated with the "hour" of the Messiah's manifestation: from the beginning of Jesus' ministry at Cana to its fulfillment on the cross. In both places, Mary is the "woman" of the new times, the bride at the wedding feast of the kingdom, the mother in the community of disciples. "Mary has been associated in a singular way with the mystery of God made man and with His saving work." (Constitutions 2) Her union with Jesus defines our vocation and the way we proclaim the Gospel.

And you yourself a sword will pierce (Lk. 2:35)

"And you yourself a sword will pierce," says the old man Simeon to the young woman Mary, who carries Jesus in her arms. What sword is he talking about?

In the Book of Revelation, the risen Jesus appears with a sharp two edged sword coming forth from his mouth. (Rev. 1:16) It is the sword of his living and effective word *"penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus himself is this word. He is the sword.

Mary lived with her soul pierced by the word of her son. That word-sword wounds and opens the heart because it provokes confrontation and contradiction and causes what

one carries within to be manifested openly. It is not easy to accept this Jesus. The way he speaks is hard, *"who can accept it?"* (Jn. 6:60) It's painful.

Mary's inner struggle to digest her son's word is the combat of faith. As the daughter of Sion, she suffers in her own flesh the tension between the old and the new that involves *"the fall and rise of many in Israel"* (Lk. 2:34) because of Jesus. The four Gospels, each in their own way, show us how Jesus causes rupture among the people of the covenant and among his own disciples. Some accept; others reject him. Jesus does not judge, because he has not come to judge but to save the world. However he says, *"The word that I spoke, it will condemn him on the last day."* (Jn. 12:48) Until that last day, no one has the right to judge his brother or sister. However we all experience the rupture caused by the word-sword that pierces the soul and conscience of each of us. Mary experienced this also. She was the first.

"I have come to bring not peace but the sword," says Jesus. (Mt. 10:34) New wine doesn't go well with old wineskins. Judas can't tolerate the perfume of Bethany. With Jesus a conflict is unleashed that brings to light the truth of hearts and tests the quality of the weave that can only be seen from within.

Mary is associated in a singular way with the mystery of Jesus and his redemption because she experienced with herself this same struggle: from the anguish of pregnancy (*"How can this be?"* Lk. 1:34) to her new motherhood at the foot of the cross (*"Behold, your son."* Jn. 19:26). Mary was no stranger to misunderstanding in a family, she who thought that Jesus was out of his mind. (Mk. 3:21) She also suffered from the importance that Jesus gave early on to the things of his Father. (Lk. 2:48-50) In spite of it all, she would be the disciple who kept the word of God (that word-sword) in her heart. As only a woman can do, she would keep that treasure within and would lovingly overcome the trials of scandal, poverty, exile, abandonment by the apostles and the cross. The power of darkness was not able to defeat Jesus. Nor could the dragon of the apocalypse overcome this woman. (Rev. 12:17) Mary resisted and the torrential waters vomited forth by the dragon (Rev. 12:15) would be unable to overcome her commitment of love. (Songs 8:7)

The work of salvation

What happens in Mary is essential for the work of Jesus. The symbol of the heart points to a relationship, toward another heart with which it connects in a dialogue of love. The heart, like love, seeks response. Like the voice of the bridegroom and the bride (Jer. 33:11), who call one another to an encounter of love, of the body, of covenant.

In the mystery of salvation, which is the mystery of the incarnation of God in human reality, the first heart to heart dialogue is the one between Jesus and Mary. What happens between Jesus and Mary reveals to us what God is like and foretells the destiny of the human adventure. What happens between Mary and Jesus sheds light on the struggles of life, the aridity of our sin, the hopes of the poor and the often heartrending pain of existence in this "valley of tears." What happens between Mary and Jesus opens a door to hope.

Mary has been associated in the work of salvation because God saves by becoming human and creating bonds of mercy. And that can only be understood from the Mary's motherhood and discipleship.

Among the more delicate theological concepts is precisely that of redemption. Why do we need to be redeemed? From what must we be saved? Why must we understand the human person from the perspective of a deficiency, a fault, a situation of abasement, as if he/she were a survivor of a shipwreck? An unsettling question for one's conscience. A

thorny obstacle in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. A motive of suspicion for the mentality of many in the modern west, so jealous of the autonomy of the individual.

I don't have answers to such lofty questions. What I do know is that to enter into this mystery of redemption (just to enter not to explain it), one must pass through the door that is the embrace between these two hearts, Jesus' and Mary's. They are two holy, united, intertwined hearts...the Sacred Hearts.

Behold your mother (Jn. 19:27)

From the relationship of Jesus and Mary is born a multitude of believers. Jesus, the firstborn of all creation, the first of a great multitude of brothers and sisters (Col. 1:15, 18), is conceived in Mary. And when her Son's hour arrives, Mary becomes the mother of believers, of the new humanity, of the new people, "*Woman, behold, your son.*" (Jn. 19, 26).

Every being that comes into this world is called to find refuge in the shelter of this mystery of childhood, motherhood, and communion. No one is alone. For us to live is to enter in this relationship inaugurated in the union of the heart of Jesus and the heart of Mary. Consecrated to the Sacred Hearts, we can understand our mission as meant to connect others in this relationship: to awaken in each heart the incredible surprise of finding oneself included in that heart to heart embrace.

The only way to understand such a mission is through human contact that is close and compassionate, really becoming engaged with the people we encounter and not passing by on the opposite side. A person is never an object to classify, a matter to deal with, or a means to use. Each person is a son or daughter of God, redeemed by the mystery of love in the heart of Jesus (from which flows blood and water) and the heart of Mary (a heart also wounded and also fruitful).

So brothers, let us evaluate the quality of our human relationships. Let us not be standoffish with those we serve. In particular, I think it's good that we be directly involved in the task of passing on the faith. Let us not withdraw from catechesis or Christian formation, as if that were someone else's work. We could run the risk of becoming mere religious functionaries who preside at the sacraments without listening to the people's hearts. Let us also take the initiative to move beyond the group of those who already believe and make known to others this mystery of merciful love to which we are consecrated. Let us give time to caring for people, especially the very poor and those who suffer most. Let us proclaim with our life that God's love has taken flesh in Jesus, born of Mary and that, precisely for that reason, the heart of each human being is holy ground where God is acting.

