

# The emblem of the Congregation

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They say a picture is worth a thousand words. An image looked at often, which is part of daily life, can become a symbol that connects to deep realities that touch us, affect us and are really decisive in trying to understand ourselves and in guiding our feelings and actions. So I hope you will not be surprised by the subject I am going to talk about. I know that some find it irrelevant or passé but for many others it is something which arouses curiosity and interest.



General Statute 13 says that the traditional habit of the Congregation has *the emblem of the Sacred Hearts* embroidered in white on the scapular. Many brothers and also some provincial chapters have asked me what is this emblem that the statute speaks about. This also caused much talk when we went to the audience with the Pope during last year's General Chapter, as the habits had very different models of this emblem on the scapular. What is "the real one"? What can we say about that?

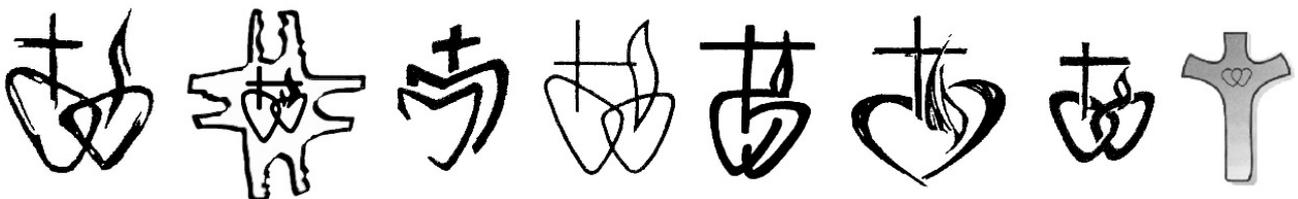
## Logo and emblem

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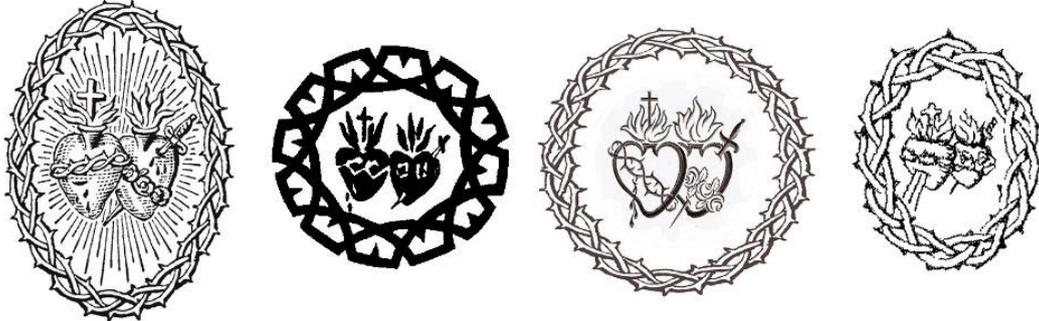
Let's begin by making some distinctions.

An emblem is an image that contains certain significant elements that, as a whole, constitute a symbol. For an image to be an emblem in the proper sense, it has to bring together all its significant elements.

A **logo** however, is a stylized graphic that takes some elements of the emblem and becomes an easily identifiable image that can be used on all kinds of things: clothing, written documents, posters, webpages, pencils and pens etc. The creator of a logo has a broad margin of creative freedom, the objective being to come up with an image that is simple and attractive. As we know so well, there is a grand number of SSCC logos in the Congregation:



The **emblem** is an image that is more complex. Artistically it can be represented in different ways but its structure is more defined than a logo. Generally, the objects that make up the emblem are represented in a realistic way, while in the case of a logo they are usually very stylized and abstract and they merely allude to the reality represented. The secret of the emblem lays in the mystery that it refers to.



We will now take a look the essential elements that have to be present for an image to be considered *the emblem of the Congregation* strictly speaking.

## The elements of the emblem of the Sacred Hearts

In the presentations of the emblem that come to us since the time of the founders, we can identify the following elements:

1. The **crown of thorns**: *"Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head."* (Mt. 27:29) The crown, traditionally made up of three interwoven branches of thorns, frames the whole image (as a circle or oval) and also encircles the heart of Jesus. It is the crown of a king whose kingdom is not of this world and who has not come to be served but to serve and give his life for the many. It is the crown of the suffering servant who bears mockery and torture.
2. The **two hearts** united, the hearts of Jesus and Mary: *"They saw the child with Mary, his mother"* (Mt. 2:11); *"standing by the cross (was) his mother"* (Jn. 19:25). They are hearts of flesh. The inner organs speak to us of the incarnation, of how God took our flesh, was born of woman, and became our brother. But the heart, understood in the biblical sense, is the spiritual center of the person from which springs love, goodness and mercy. There is not just one heart but two, for what happens between Jesus and his mother brings about and shows forth the redemptive work of God, to which Mary has been associated in a singular way.
3. The **fire**: *"I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!"* (Lk. 12:49) The fire expresses Jesus' desire, the desire for the reign of God, the desire to transform all things through love. There is fire on the two hearts, for Mary also participates in this fire by her faith and discipleship. She is the one who kept all these things in her heart.
4. The **cross** on the heart of Jesus. *"And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."* (Jn. 12:32) The cross identifies Jesus and Christians. The cross is the tree of life on which the grain of wheat dies to bear fruit. It is the height of conflict and rejection and also the place of redemption, forgiveness and love. As the Good Father would say, in the Congregation we will always be "children of the cross."

5. The **wound** in Jesus' heart: "*They will look upon him whom they have pierced.*" (Jn. 19:37) According to the Fathers of the Church, the wound made by the soldiers lance in the side of Jesus crucified is the source of grace and life. As the mystical tradition originating in the middle ages would claim, we have access to Jesus' heart through this wound. That heart, which loved so much, is a wounded heart.
6. The **sword** piercing Mary's heart: "*and you yourself a sword will pierce.*" (Lk. 2:35). Mary lives with her heart pierced by the word of God, because of the conflict her Son generates and because of the pain of rejection and the Passion.
7. The **crown of flowers** around Mary's heart: "*Like a lily among thorns...*" (Song of Songs 2:2) The garland of flowers traditionally refers to the rosary, where invocation to Mary accompanies the different mysteries of the life of Christ, all his "ages." And here once more we see the union of Mary and Jesus in the work of the redemption.

All these elements blend together in a kind of symphony to produce a unique evangelical impact. The emblem envelops us in the radiance of Easter. As it elicits the passion, at the same time it shows hearts beating with life and a love strong enough to overcome death. The symbol does not allow itself to be reduced to a mere conceptual explanation, but it works at us from within serving as a path to union with the mystery of God's love. Each person will see what this might mean in their life and where this mystery may lead.

"Logos" have less evocative power because they only use some elements of the emblem, stylize them and reject others. Frequently they eliminate the crown of thorns and the sword and picture the fire as sort of a gentle flame only on the heart of Mary, leaving out the fire coming from Jesus' heart. Logos can be done well and be beautiful but they are not the same thing as the emblem.

## **ID badge or an arrow pointing somewhere?**

We may be interested in the emblem in order to use it as an *ID badge* for our Congregation. We use it to say, "here we are, we are the SSCC, don't confuse us with someone else." It's not a bad thing to have external signs of identity. It is comforting to know that I'm part of a group that can define itself for who it is. Not many years ago we put a large emblem on the facade of the Generalate that indicates that this is a house of the Congregation. I like it.

However, the most important thing about our emblem is that it be *an arrow pointing somewhere*, in other words, not so much a sign pointing to ourselves indicating who we are, but an arrow that shows us where we should be carrying the love revealed in the Sacred Hearts. The emblem is an invitation to follow Jesus, make our own the attitudes, options and tasks that led Jesus to the point of having his Heart transpierced on the cross. (Constitutions 3). In the end it is a question that opens a path for us to explore.

What happens in our life when our Master and Lord is a King crowned with thorns? With what love will I love others when I see that God's love becomes flesh and takes the reality of people's suffering seriously? How far will my surrender and my generosity

stretch when I look at these burning hearts? When I see Mary's heart pierced by a sword, what will be my attitude toward difficulties and wounds that pain me? To what work of reconciliation and justice will I be drawn as I look at the cross planted in the heart of Jesus? What hope and consolation will I bring to the abandoned from the wound in the side of Christ?...

We are not so much interested in putting on a badge to show ourselves to others, but rather in letting ourselves be led where the wounded and burning love of God is pointing us. It's good to embroider a nice emblem of the Sacred Hearts on our scapular. It's even better to engrave it with fire in our very lives.

What must we do, Lord?... Let us contemplate the emblem of the Sacred Hearts and we will find light and strength to find the answer each day.