

Immaculate Heart of Mary

Feastday: Moveable

Immaculate Heart of Mary
Saturday following the Second Sunday after Pentecost
Memorial
Liturgical Colour: White
Wing to wing, oar to oar, heart to heart

The images by which the Church describes Herself are primarily feminine—Bride, Mother, Virgin, Spouse—while masculine terms are used for the Church’s ministry— the Office of Saint Peter, Office of Bishop, Holy Orders, etc. The fatherly labour and paternal structure of the Church are an outgrowth of her essentially maternal nature. *Ecclesia Mater*, Mother Church, loves with a huge heart, while Apostles, bishops, priests, and deacons hold souls together in their common mother’s embrace. In the thinking of Pope Saint John Paul II, the “Marian Church,” the Church of discipleship, precedes and makes possible the “Petrine Church,” the Church of office and authority. So authority serves discipleship, and discipleship has pre-eminence over, and makes sense of, authority. Even the fatherly and authoritative Saint Paul speaks with maternal concern, calling new Christians his “children,” saying he is like a “nurse” to them, and bragging that he has “begotten” them through the Gospel.

On today’s Feast of Mary’s Immaculate Heart, the maternal warmth radiating from the core of Mary bakes the faithful soul. Our hearts glow when we look upon the seven-pierced heart of the mother of Jesus and commiserate with the holy longing in her tender eyes. Our love for Mary also softens our love for our mother the Church. Our minds know that the Church loves us and nourishes us with sanctifying grace. But intellectual convictions need to be felt. In the same way that Christ concretely and historically images the Father, so too Mary images, concretely and historically, the Church. Mary is not a mere symbol of the Church but anticipates and embodies what she gave birth to. Absent Mary, the Church would be just a little bit too hard, too distant, and too austere. It would be like a camping site or a large, cold, house, providing shelter but lacking a woman’s touch. Mary converts the dry household of faith into a cosy family home. Without her heartfelt love, the house would simply not be the same. The prophecy of Simeon in the second chapter of Luke’s Gospel is the first biblical indication of Mary’s interior suffering. Simeon tells Mary that Jesus will be a sign that will be contradicted and that a sword shall pierce her own heart. Years later, Mary and Joseph panic when Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem while they return to Nazareth. When they recover him in the temple and return home, Luke tells us that Mary “treasured all these things

in her heart” ([Lk 2:51](#)). At the foot of the cross, Mary’s pondering heart is crushed and bewildered when sin closes in on her Son. But just when Christ’s life appears to be stillborn, Mary’s heart is vivified by the resurrection, and she becomes the first-century Church’s indispensable witness and most sturdy anchor.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary is not a closed garden. We don’t peek in through the window of the family home in Nazareth to spy Mary standing in the kitchen. Mary’s life was not as public as her Son’s, but it was not as private as her contemporaries. And in the Book of Revelation, her mystical significance is exposed for all to see. She straddles heaven and earth in a duel with the devil. Mary’s wounded maternal heart beats strong and fast for the faithful and for the world, then, on a cosmic stage. Her heart is sinless but bruised, slit by seven swords of sorrow and dripping red for love of man. Vatican II’s description of Mary as the Temple of the Holy Spirit (*Lumen Gentium* 52-53) implies that her heart is the red-hot tabernacle of that Temple. Today’s feast was first referred to as Mary’s “Admirable Heart” or “Most Pure Heart.” Yet all the titles reflect the same truth; just like the love of Jesus’s Sacred Heart, Mary’s love for Christ and us is a tangible, human love. The Queen and King of Hearts are united in their love of all that is worth loving.

Prayer

Immaculate Heart of Mary, your bruised but beating heart softens our love for you and the Church. Your love is maternal, warm, docile, and concerned. Infuse our hearts with love like yours so we can live like you in this world and the next.