

The Admirable Heart of Mary

By Fr. Ron Bagley, CJM



Statue of Mary nursing Jesus which St. John Eudes kept throughout his life

St. John Eudes had great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He begins his spiritual diary by attributing his own birth to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

"My father and mother were married three years without being able to have children because of a curse that had been put upon them. Then they made a vow in honor of the Blessed Virgin, to go to Notre Dame de la Recouvrance [Our Lady of Recovery] which is a place of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in a chapel in the parish church of Tourailles, in the Diocese of Seez [near his birthplace]. When my mother became pregnant, she and my father made a pilgrimage to that same chapel where they offered and consecrated me to Our Lord and Our Lady". (*Memoriale Beneficiorum Dei*)

When he was about 18, he was as student at the college (high school) in Caen. He speaks of his devotion to Mary again.

I was received into the Sodality of Our Lady, at the college of the very reverend Jesuit Fathers of Caen about the year 1618, wherein Our Lord granted me extraordinary graces through the intercession of His Most Holy Mother.

Throughout his life, his devotion to Mary was known far and wide. There is a letter written to John Eudes dated 1660 from a Jesuit priest in Canada who had heard of his devotion to Mary.

"I have been consoled to hear from M. Torcapel of the holy ambition you have of *surpassing everybody, no matter who they may be*, in love of Our Lady. Would to God that you could communicate this spirit to all ambitious men in this world." And the good father asks his correspondent "to unite him as the smallest of his young brothers"

in his love for Our Lady. Indeed there are not many authors who have consecrated so many and such enthusiastic pages to Mary.

When he was about 35 years old, traveling and preaching parish missions, he began to realize that what was most important about Mary was her heart. By this he meant the deepest core of her person, the very center of her personality. He began to feel a desire to honor, praise and celebrate the Heart of Mary

At the end of 1647, he composed a Mass and Office (Liturgy of the Hours) in honor of the Heart of Mary. At the beginning of the following year, he preached a mission in the city of Autun, in the eastern part of France. The local bishop showed interest in John Eudes' desire to honor the Heart of Mary. He gave his approval to the texts and gave John Eudes permission to celebrate a feast in honor of the Heart of Mary. This celebration took place on February 8, 1648 in the cathedral church. This is the first celebration of its kind in the history of the Church

In the years that followed, John Eudes wrote several books about the Heart of Mary. Most notable among them was his 3 volume monumental work *The Admirable Heart of the Most Holy Mother of God*. He finished writing this book in the last days of his life. His aim was "to gather all that, in the past, had been said about the Heart of Mary and to add his personal reflections"

Meaning of the Feast and Devotion

From the texts of the Mass and Office, as well as other writings, we can identify five principal themes that John Eudes put forth concerning the Heart of Mary.

1. The Heart of Mary is full of love for God and for us.

In the *Admirable Heart of Mary* we read:

Although the heart represents the whole interior of a person, it is principally the symbol of love. So, in venerating the Heart of Mary, we wish to honor, not a particular mystery, action or quality, not her very worthy person, but the source and origin of what makes all that worthy and holy, that is to say, her love and charity.

St. John Eudes tells us that to honor the Heart of Mary is to honor the love she had for God and for us.

It [the Heart of Mary] is full of love for God. It never loved anyone but God and what God wanted it to love in him and for him. It is full of love because the Blessed Virgin always loved God with all her heart and soul, with all her strength. It is full of love not only because she always wanted what God did and never wanted anything he did not want, but also because she always found satisfaction in doing God's most lovable will.

It is also full of love for us:

She loves us with the same love with which she loves God since it is God she sees and loves in us. Her love for us is the same as her love for the God-man, her Son Jesus, because she knows he is our Head and we are his members, that we are one with him as members are one with the head. That is why she sees and loves us somewhat like her Son and her own children.

He connects this to his important theme of the Mystical Body of Christ: Jesus the head and we the members of his body.

A first reason is that, being the Mother of the Head, she is Mother of the members. A second reason is that our Savior on the Cross gave us to her as her children. Not only did he give her to us as our Queen and Sovereign, but in the most advantageous capacity we could ever imagine, that is, as our Mother, repeating to each one of us what he said to his beloved disciple: *Behold your Mother*. That is why, in all your deeds, needs, problems and afflictions, have recourse to the Heart of our most charitable Mother.

2. Jesus is present in the Heart of Mary.

John Eudes teaches us that Jesus is present, living and reigning in the Heart of his Mother. In the antiphon for the hour of Sext for the feast of the Heart of Mary he writes:

Happy are you, Mary who bore the Creator of the world; but happier still because, before you carried him in your body, you bore Him in your Heart.

This expression is not original to St. John Eudes. He is actually paraphrasing St. Augustine. He uses the exact quotation often in his writings, for example, in the Admirable Heart of Mary:

A testimony of St. Augustine's ardent devotion to the Admirable Heart of Mary is found in his book on her Virginity: *The divine maternity would not have profited Mary if she had not first borne Jesus Christ in her Heart more happily and advantageously than in her womb.*

She bore him in her womb for only nine months whereas she bore him in her Heart from the very first moment of her life and will carry him there eternally.

She bore him in a more noble and holier manner in her Heart than in her womb, since her Heart is a living heaven in which the King of heaven and earth is loved more passionately and glorified more perfectly than in heaven.

Also in the Opening Prayer for the Mass he composed:

O God, you willed that your only-begotten Son should live and reign in the Heart of the Virgin Mother. Grant us, we pray, that, following the example of Jesus and Mary, we may constantly accomplish your will in all things, and so merit to have but one heart with them and among ourselves.

It appears also in the Prayer after Communion:

O God, you willed that the marvelous mystery of your Son be preserved and pondered in the Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Grant us, we pray, that, as we have received our living bread at the altar, we may constantly bear in our hearts the image of Christ.

He was thinking the same thing in his choice of the gospel reading for the feast. It is from the beginning of the gospel of Luke, just after the birth of Jesus.

Now when the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us." They went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger; once they saw, they understood what had been told them concerning this child. All who heard of it were astonished at the report given them by the shepherds. Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart.

John Eudes sees Mary doing what all Christians are called to do: reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation in their hearts.

3. Jesus IS the Heart of Mary.

St. John Eudes teaches us that Jesus lives and reigns so perfectly in the Heart of Mary, that it is possible to say that He IS the Heart of Mary. John Eudes is bold enough to speak this way. That is why St. John Eudes has no fear of slighting Jesus by emphasizing Mary.

Obviously, some people of his time objected to his emphasis on Mary. They may have expressed a fear that he was moving away from the core mystery of salvation. He answered his critics in the *Admirable Heart of Mary*:

All you who thirst, come and drink at this spring [Heart of Mary]. Hurry ! Why delay a moment longer? Because you are afraid to offend the goodness of your Redeemer if you go to the Heart of his Mother? Don't you know that Mary is nothing, has nothing and can do nothing except from Jesus, through him and in him? Don't you know that it is Jesus who is everything in her, can and does everything in her? Not only does Jesus live and remain continually in the Heart of Mary, he is himself the heart of her Heart. So, to have recourse to the Heart of Mary is to come to Jesus; to honor her Heart is to honor Jesus; praying to the Heart of Mary is praying to Jesus.

To him it is very clear. There is no difficulty. He is quick to add:

This admirable Heart is the prototype and model of our own hearts. Perfection consists in transforming them into living reproductions of the most holy Heart of Mary. Moreover, the eternal Father gave Mary the power to conceive his Son, first in her Heart, before conceiving him in her virginal womb. So too, he has given her the power to do the same in the hearts of the children of Adam.

We can turn to Mary. She will help us receive Jesus into our hearts. Then he can live and reign in our hearts as well. Jesus is always living and reigning in the Heart of Mary

4. The Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary are one and the same heart.

Jesus and Mary are so closely united that they have but one heart. John Eudes goes so far as to say that they not only have one heart, but that they are one heart. He often speaks of the one Heart of Jesus and Mary. He famously prays: “Hail, most loving Heart of Jesus and Mary.”

Why did St. John Eudes speak this way? It is because in the Heart of Jesus and Mary, he was contemplating the close communion, the perfect unity between Jesus and Mary. She is the first member of the Mystical Body. The one Heart of Jesus and Mary is the first cell of the mystical body. In this way of thinking, the Church is an extension of this marvelous union

5. Our vocation: To become one with the Heart of Jesus and Mary

Listen again to the Opening Prayer from the Mass:

O God, you willed that your only-begotten Son should live and reign in the Heart of the Virgin Mother. Grant us, we pray, that, following the example of Jesus and Mary, we may constantly accomplish your will in all things, and so merit to have but one heart with them and among ourselves.

All Christians are invited into this unity which exists between Jesus and Mary. God wills that we have a share in this community. The Heart of Jesus and Mary is a source of unity for us. We constitute a community with the Heart of Jesus and Mary as well as with our brothers and sisters. It adds another dimension to our call to community.

Conclusion

You can see that the devotion of St. John Eudes to the Heart of Mary is something quite profound. It is much more than reciting a prayer, saying a novena, or displaying a statue.

It calls for a commitment. If we meditate on the Heart of Mary, it leads us to Jesus, to the Church and to the needs of the world. It's a devotion that sends us out to our mission in the world.

The Heart of Mary can be a great motivation for our daily ministry. It can be the basis for an apostolic spirituality. Its meaning can motivate us in our prayer as well as our ministry.

