

**THE SUPREME LOVE OF THE RELIGIOUS HEART:
HEART OF JESUS**

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The heart of a religious is a heart only for God, it is an undivided heart; a heart that seeks, in everything, to do the will of God. "The religious vocation in essence is a call of love and for love."¹ There is a covenant of spousal love between a religious heart and God. God calls, one willingly answers entering into a mystery of spousal union. This answering or responding creates a special relationship between Jesus' Heart and a religious heart; "an answer of love: a love of self-giving, which is the heart of consecration, of the consecration of the person."² The call of God is a call of love and the response is a response of love. It is an election made by God, calling some to a closer more intimate following of Christ. When God calls a heart, the heart is so deeply moved that it begins to see ordinary things in a new light. Things that were once important are replaced by things of God; gently, but clearly God begins to covet a heart, draw it closer to Himself, "so I will allure her; I will lead her to the desert and speak to her heart."³ While He does this, through the Holy Spirit, He pours out all the graces necessary for a response of love; for the response He seeks but will never impose; for the "fiat" of Mary. The heart grows in such love for God and the things of God; it says "I will do what you ask of me simply out of love for you." It renounces its life, loved ones, career, pets and anything that stands in the way of this spousal union with God; "charity took possession of my soul and filled me with the spirit of self-forgetfulness, and from that time I was always happy."⁴ Pope John Paul II tells us, "This does not mean merely giving up marriage and family life. It also has a positive aspect in the charismatic choice of Christ as one's exclusive Spouse. This "special mode of love" which moves one to choose Christ is a gift which can come only from God Himself," says Sr. Evelyn Ann Schumachar, O.S.F, in her book entitled "An Undivided Heart."⁵ A religious heart seeks always to please God, has no other devotion than God. "I no longer have any great desires, beyond that of loving 'til I die of love."⁶ The whole person is given to the Bridegroom. "He wants us to offer Him our very person. This means a profound constant "yes" of a spousal order; it means loving Him above everything else. Only then can He fully share His "spousal" love with us."⁷



In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptionis Donum*, JPII tells us, "The special covenant of spousal love is made, in which we seem to hear an unceasing echo of the words concerning Israel, whom the Lord 'has chosen as his own possession.' For in every consecrated person the Israel of the new and eternal covenant is chosen."⁸ Much like a couple in love, a heart called to be religious grows in intimacy with God. Little by little letting God, the things of God and how to please God become an all consuming thought. "My God...I love Thee."⁹ The heart begins to see how many things in the world do not glorify God and ponders on how to change this. It begins to desire nothing else than to be with God. Eventually it enters into a spousal union with God, in many ways a marriage with God, He becomes the best friend, the one that listens, the one that's always there, the one that consoles, the one that begins to elevate our souls to the heights He created it for. "Consecrated persons who give spousal love to Christ find therein the true meaning of their lives."¹⁰ It is a covenant of spousal love, with the total dedication of the whole being to the heart of the Beloved a heart that burns with love "like a furnace".

A religious heart lives in imitation of Christ poor, obedient and chaste through the evangelical counsels that are a gift from the Trinity. They are an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. To fully understand we must see them from the perspective of the Trinity. The Father and His love for the Son, the Son and His love for the Father and the love that gushes forth from this mutual exchange from love; the Holy Spirit. We need to see with the eyes of our hearts, the love of God for us, our love for God and the fruits of this give-and-take of love. Chastity, in particular, refers in a distinct way to the love of the human heart; this is to say, chastity of the heart. "In living these counsels, the consecrated person lives with special intensity the love of the Son for the Father through the action of the Holy Spirit."

"Since the consecrated life is rooted in "spousal love," chastity is the foundation for poverty and obedience, for without chastity, the other two would have no meaning."¹¹ Religious are poor out of love for God, obedient to superiors out of love for God, living in this way without the love for God is not truly living a religious life. The religious heart chooses to live this way simply out of love for God and for no other reason. Sr. Evelyn Ann Schumacher, O.S.F says, "Spousal love means unqualified, single-hearted devotion to Christ, a devotion which is shared with no other person. Just as husband and wife through their marriage vows are reserved for each other alone, so does the vow of chastity reserve the religious for Jesus Christ alone."¹²

When God calls a heart, He desires this heart for entirely for Himself. To do this He allows an attraction, a desire to live this call in a particular way; He nudges a heart towards a specific charism, a specific way to respond to His call.

What is a charism? Accordingly to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "a charism is a grace of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefits the church, they are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives it and by all members of the Church as well."¹³ The Holy Spirit is the medium through which God gives us His love, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."¹⁴ One need only look at our charism and see that it is love. Our charism is love and its home is "in the pierced heart of Jesus."¹⁵ Through this charism we contemplate God from within His pierced heart. We contemplate His love and mercy; we learn to open our hearts, receive this love and give this love. "I feel that my mission is about to begin - to make others love God as I love Him."¹⁶

We, as religious and in a particular way SCTJM, are given the pierced heart of Jesus, a heart that loves us and all mankind to the extreme. In the words of our Mother Foundress, "...we should never conform ourselves to anything less than forming our hearts to grow to the great heights of love- a love to the extreme only afterwards, and as a consequence, (since there are the different expressions and the different faces and forms of love) will all the other virtues develop. Is not love that which produces humility? Is not love the motor behind purity? Is not love the font of self-donation? Is not love the strength behind meekness and the measure of justice? Is not love the origin mercy and the reason for patience? Is not love the only one that creates all the good in our hearts? That is why, sisters, with great ardor we must incessantly look to break through the narrowness of our hearts and widen them to welcome this kind of love."¹⁷ A heart willing to expose itself, showing its interior, giving everything out of love and for love; a heart willing to suffer, to die out of love and for love, the heart of Jesus. The heart of Jesus is the love of God, Jesus is love. He completely gives of himself on the cross and in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is God with us. The Franciscan Friar Fr. Stefano Manelli, in the book titled Jesus Our Eucharistic Love, tells us: "The Eucharistic Jesus is here with us as a brother, as a friend, as spouse of our souls. He wishes to enter within us to be our Food for eternal life, our love, our support. He wants to make us part of His mystical Body in which He would redeem us and save us, and then take us into the kingdom of Heaven to settle us in an everlasting bliss of love."¹⁸ Jesus is still present with us here today, everyday at every mass throughout the world; in every tabernacle. Mankind, people are afraid to open up and receive the immense love God has for us. "If we knew the gift of a God who is Love and who gives Himself to us as a Gift full of love!, 'The Eucharist,' said St. Bernard, "is that Love which surpasses all loves in Heaven and on earth." And St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: 'The Eucharist is the Sacrament of Love: It signifies Love, It produces love."¹⁹ The love we were created to receive and return, the love for which he sent Jesus to show us how to love, out of this love to show us His mercy and redeem us. We receive this heart and by our example bring it to the world, showing others how by our example they too can bring this heart of Jesus to others; creating a civilization of love.

Jesus shows that love involves obedience, as he was obedient to his Father's will, even accepting death as the greatest expression of God's love for us; "...he humbled himself becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross."²⁰

This love prompted creation, the creation of mankind. Mankind was created out of love, to receive love and to love; to love God who IS love. "I ask Jesus to draw me into the fire of his love, and to unite me so closely to himself that he may live and act in me."²¹ Creation is an expression of God's love! Mankind, by its lack of

faith, trust and obedience in God turned to evil ways, but God loved the world that He sent His only son Jesus to redeem mankind, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."²² It is imperative that we realize that we were to be like God; "we are created in the image and likeness of a God who "is" Love. So the plenitude of the human person comes from our ability to love...and to love like God loves."²

Jesus' life was completely obedient to the will of the Father, he was poor and chaste. Jesus' is Love Incarnated; love made flesh. The heart of the religious is molded by the Father in a very particular way to receive and imitate the love and life of Christ and to make his love of Christ the center of our lives. "Religious profession places in the heart of each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, the love of the Father: that love which is in the heart of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It is love which embraces the world and everything in it that comes from the Father, and which at the same time tends to overcome in the world everything that 'does not come from the Father.'²⁴ Through the profession of the Evangelical counsels manifest in a concrete way this love and total dedication to Christ. A religious person is called to a closer following, imitation of Christ through these counsels. By our example a religious proclaims Christ to the world; we show the world the love of Christ, the love and mercy of the Triune God. Perfectae Caritatis tells us, "Let those who make profession of the evangelical counsels seek and love above all else God who has first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:10) and let them strive to foster in all circumstances a life hidden with Christ in God (cf. Col.3:3). This love of God both excites and energizes that love of one's neighbor which contributes to the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church."²⁵

"In the apostolate which consecrated persons exercise, their spousal love for Christ becomes, in an organic way as it were, love for the Church as the Body of Christ, for the Church as the People of God, for the Church which is at one and the same time Spouse and Mother."²⁶ We constantly refer to the Church as a body. In comparison to the physical body, we can say that religious men and women are the arms and hands of this body. The arms and hands bring care and healing to the wounds of the body and its parts. For example, if one falls down and gets cut one has to apply a band aid to the cut using their hand. This will promote healing and eventually restore the area back to its healthy self. Has anyone ever had an itch they can't reach? It's uncomfortable right? Imagine the body having an itch and being unable to scratch; one needs arms and hands to reach to be able to scratch. When one itches, one doesn't scratch to the point where one brings more harm than good. In the same way the love of God, through religious men and women manifests itself; gently soothing the itch without harming the skin or in this analogy, the heart. Religious become the channels through which God brings this soothing love to mankind, to their hearts and souls. A religious, by the closer imitation of Christ, by being the hands of the body that is the Church, reveals the healing love of God to the world. This happens by our example, by our way of life, through our prayers and service. "In the heart of the Church, my vocation is love."²⁷

In Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict XVI says: "...seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities. I can give them the look of love which they crave." A healing look because love makes all things new...love heals the wounds of the human heart. If this is true for all Christians it has an even deeper meaning for religious whom by his/her total self giving to Christ becomes to all men an icon of his love and presence."²⁸

A religious strives to reach the perfection of love, what is the perfection of love? The perfection of love is a total union with God. Yes, the supreme love of the heart of a religious is the heart of Christ, the heart that has loved us so much, loved to the extreme, allowing Himself to be pierced, pouring forth his Blood and Water as a fountain of love and mercy, restoring and healing the hearts of men. "God is infinite love...be healed by the love of the Heart of God, because His Love is Infinite. In other words, it has no limits! It is a love without conditions, without frontiers, without divisions, without limits, it has no end."²⁹

The heart of Jesus in an infinite plethora of love, it is a love so great, so deep that it is incomprehensible, yet made so simple. This heart becomes the treasure of the heart of those consecrated to him. His superabundant love permeates the hearts of all religious men and women giving us the capacity to diffuse this love towards others. God dwells in each one of us, as religious we see past the humanity; we see the God

that dwells in each person, we serve and love that God through God, for God. Religious must be open to God, allowing Him to love through them, let Him "use you."³⁰

Love can not be contained; love needs to be given away. Love as we share in it testifies to the nature of God and to his presence in our lives. One who loves shows that one is a child of God and knows God, for God's very being is love: one without love is without God. "The nature of love is to express itself, to give if itself. Only in realizing our insignificance and weakness can we appreciate God's love."³¹ Both God and neighbor should be loved with the same love, yet in different ways. Many times God gives the gift of a special heart, one through which He can manifest His love and caring. Take for example, our Mother General and Vicar General, they are more than just Mother General and Vicar General, they have a friendship in God, a bond of love in God that stems from their individual and communitarian union with God. Love is the essence of communion. The book entitled, "The Way of Love, Reflections on Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*," tells us: "The fullness of God's love is revealed to us through human love, which then follows the same intention as Christ's love, who love us *propter nos* ("for our sake," as we say in the Creed), in response to the love of the Father. In this matter Christ identifies with man in his need to be loved."³²

Again, John Paul II, says in a passage from his first encyclical *Redemptor Homini*, "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."³³ This ties into the first and second commandments; "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as your self.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Simply one cannot reach love without communion, first with God and then with ones brothers and sisters.³⁴ "I give you a new commandment; love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another."³⁵ God gives His love, one receives humbly accepting any and all gifts God the Father wishes to grant through the Holy Spirit; recognizing that everything is grace. St. Therese of Lisieux would say "I will always bow down beneath the outpouring of divine grace, knowing that it is the gift of God."³⁶ A religious should be open and receptive to gifts of Holy Spirit. We should be docile to these gifts, a complete and total surrender and trust in the love of God. These gifts are freely given, should be freely received and freely given back to the works of God. The gifts of grace that a religious heart receives are to be given totally for the good of the Church-for the good of all. Using these gifts to bring love of God to the mankind, through which we serve God, serving God is an expression of love; therefore we become a witness of love to the world. "It is precisely this witness of love that the world today and all humanity need."³⁷ Therefore, the love we have for one another must be authentic and merciful; it must be proof that we know God. We need, in the words of our Mother Foundress, "a generous heart, a heart allowing God to freely use their hearts to reveal His love, making them instruments to reveal His love; therefore becoming one movement of love to receive and communicate."³⁸ As witnesses of love to the world, a religious helps restore the faith in the love of God that has been lost in modern society. A sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop says, "Faith is the womb that conceives this new life, baptism the rebirth by which it is brought forth into the light of day. The Church is its nurse; her teachings are its milk, the bread from heaven is its food. It is brought to maturity by the practice of virtue; it is wedded to wisdom; it gives birth to hope."³⁹ In a Homily St. Gregory the Great, Pope tells us, "I assure you it is not by faith that you will come to know him, but by love; not by mere conviction, but by action."⁴⁰ Our faith has to be accompanied by loving actions, but a religious first must be... in order to do. There is no greater example than that of the Blessed Virgin Mary; she becomes the model, the one a religious should strive to imitate. In the book entitled, *Our Saviour and His love for us*, Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., tells us that, "there is one absolutely perfect soul which allowed the divine life-giving torrent to flow through her without obstacle."⁴¹ Mary's heart was open, transparent and pure, she allowed God to work in her and through her. It is her yes, her "fiat," that began the redemption of mankind. It is her openness of heart that allows God to pour forth all the graces needed for the yes that would save the world. She gives this yes with a humble, meek and docile heart, a heart simply desiring to fulfill the will of God. A heart not knowing what exactly would be required of her and it did not matter as long as the will of God was being fulfilled. The will of God was for her to become the mother of all mankind; she becomes the one that leads us, points out the way towards the heart of Jesus, the Eucharistic heart of Jesus, the heart that is the love of God. The Franciscan Friar Fr. Stefano Manelli, in the book titled *Jesus Our Eucharistic Love*, says "The Eucharist is the Bread of the Mother of God, our Mother. It is Bread made by Mary from the flower of her immaculate flesh,

kneaded with her virginal milk."⁴²

The Virgin Mary was strong, never backing away from the will of God. Regardless of what it took, even when she thought she would die from the intense pain (in her heart); she stood at the foot of the cross and obeyed the will of the Father, "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother..."⁴³ Yet, she was a feminine, delicate and a tender woman, filled with the love of God; her whole life lived for the love of God. A religious (in this case) woman must be like Mary; strong, delicate, tender and loving. One who is willing to accept all God the Father wishes to give, willing generously to obey all God the Father asks, willing to serve God and His beloved children at all cost. A heart willing, ready and able to say, like Mary, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."⁴⁴ A religious woman knows beyond the shadow of a doubt, like Mary, that "nothing will be impossible for God."⁴⁵ A religious woman, like Mary, ponders all things in her heart ("and his mother kept all this things in her heart"⁴⁶), trying to comprehend and to respond more fully to the will of the Father manifested in her daily life; therefore placing complete and total trust in God. She knows He will pour forth all the graces necessary to fulfill His desire; for a religious these graces are given through the hands of Mary. To receive these graces we need only have an open, docile, generous and receptive heart; a heart like Mary.

It is said that, "as Mary's initial plenitude of grace never stopped growing within her during her lifetime, so the seed of eternal life should never cease growing in us until the moment of death." "Mary continued to increase in perfection until her death, until the moment of the final plenitude of grace when her soul entered glory."⁴⁷ As beloved children of the Father, we should, as Mary, strive to continue growing in perfection until our death; perfection complete and total union with God. Jesus lived in Mary; she is and will always be the fastest, most direct way of reaching the love that is the Heart of Jesus. "If we reflect that Jesus, the Fruit of Mary's immaculate womb, is the whole of Mary's love, of her sweetness, all of her intimacy, of her riches, of her whole life, then when we receive Him we cannot not receive her as well, who, by bonds of highest love, and by bonds of flesh and blood, forms with Jesus a single alliance of love, one whole, as she is always and inseparably 'leaning upon her Beloved' (songs 8:5)." St. Albert the Great lovingly exhorts: "My soul, if you wish to be intimate with Mary, let yourself be carried between her arms and nourished with her blood... Let this ineffable, chaste thought accompany you to the Banquet of God and you will find the Blood of the Son the nourishment of the Mother."⁴⁸

This is it! Religious should be like Mary and in a very particular way those called to be Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary! Religious must look to her for guidance, to show us the way to the Heart of Christ; Mary is the way to His heart. Through her heart we can see, feel and begin to live in the love of God. Jesus does not deny Mary anything; confident in this truth, as children of God we should have absolute trust in Mary and her intercession. Drink from the heart of Christ, as Mary, receive, guard and give this love... It is my prayer that as religious women, called from before we were in our mother's womb -- "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you..."⁴⁹ -- we allow God to transform the very fibers of our hearts; so that we too can continue to reach the heights of love He created us for. Let us always look towards Mary to show us the way. As Pope Benedict XVI said: "Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is." She shows us what love is because the only movement of her maternal heart is to be recipients of this love."⁵⁰

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, you have given the world its true light, Jesus, your Son - the Son of God. You abandoned yourself completely to God's and thus became a wellspring of the goodness which flows forth from him. Show us Jesus. Lead us to him. Teach us to know and love him, so that we too can become capable of true love and be fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world."⁵¹
Love is the only answer! God is love! God is the only answer!

¹ A Love Capable of Fidelity, Mother Adela

² Redemptionis Donum #8

³ Hos 2:16

⁴St. Therese of Lisieux, Little Flower.org

- ⁵ Undivided Heart, p. 38
- ⁶ St. Therese of Lisieux, Little Flower.org
- ⁷ Undivided Heart p. 40
- ⁸ RD#8
- ⁹ St. Therese of Lisieux, Little Flower.org
- ¹⁰ Undivided Heart, p. 39
- ¹¹ Undivided Heart, p. 36
- ¹² Undivided Heart, p. 39
- ¹³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, #799, p. 231
- ¹⁴ Rom 5:5
- ¹⁵ I Will Make You Heirs of the Treasures of My Heart, Mother Adela
- ¹⁶ St. Therese of Lisieux, Little Flower.org
- ¹⁷ The Charism of Love to the Extreme, Mother Adela
- ¹⁸ Jesus Our Eucharistic Love, p. 3
- ¹⁹ Jesus Our Eucharistic Love, p. 5
- ²⁰ Phil 2:8
- ²¹ St. Therese of Lisieux, Little Flower.org
- ²² Jn 3:16
- ²³ The Charism of Love to the Extreme, Mother Adela
- ²⁴ RD#9
- ²⁵ PC#6
- ²⁶ RD#15
- ²⁷ St. Therese of Lisieux, Little Flower.org
- ²⁸ DCE #18
- ²⁹ God is Love, Mother Adela
- ³⁰ I Will Make You Heirs of the Treasures of My Heart, Mother Adela
- ³¹ RH #10
- ³² The Way of Love, Reflections on Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical Deus Caritas Est
- ³³ RH #10
- ³⁴ Mk 12:30-31
- ³⁵ Jn 13:34
- ³⁶ Little Flower.org
- ³⁷ RD#14
- ³⁸ I Will Make You Heirs of the Treasures of My Heart, Mother Adela
- ³⁹ Oratio 1 in Christi resurrectionem: Jaeger XI, 277, 280, 305, p. 825
- ⁴⁰ Hom. 14. 3-6"PL 76, 1129-1130, p. 752
- ⁴¹ Our Saviour and His love for us, p. 326
- ⁴² Jesus Our Eucharistic Love, p. 88
- ⁴³ Jn 19:25
- ⁴⁴ Lk 1:38
- ⁴⁵ Lk 1:37
- ⁴⁶ Lk 2:51
- ⁴⁷ Our Saviour and His love for us, p. 323
- ⁴⁸ Jesus Our Eucharistic Love, p. 89
- ⁴⁹ Jeremiah 1: 5
- ⁵⁰ DCE#42
- ⁵¹ DCE#42

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