

THE HEART IN SACRED SCRIPTURES

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In Holy Scripture one can see the importance that is placed on the heart, the importance of the condition of the heart of man and the attributes of the Heart of God. We learn about God, who He is and what He desires of His creation, by meditating on the words spoken to us which come from His Divine Heart. God also takes a special interest in the heart of man "in His eyes, the quality of a person depends on the quality of his or her heart."¹



What is the heart, what is the Heart of God and what is the heart of man? Webster dictionary defines the heart as the whole personality including intellectual as well as emotional functions or traits.² The Encyclopedia of Catholicism defines heart as the locus of emotion, passion and appetite; also primarily, the seat of intellection and interior dialogue.³ In Semetic thought the word "Heart" signifies the interior life of a person.

In the Old Testament the word "heart" was used in its literal sense, but more frequently it was used in the figurative sense. For example: In the first book of Samuel chapter six, "Why do you harden your hearts, as Egypt and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?"; in the book of Deuteronomy chapter six, "You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart,... these words I urge on you today be written on your heart"; and also in the prophet Jeremiah chapter thirty one, "Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts." In the New testament we also see Jesus relating to the heart of man in the figurative sense: In the Gospel of Matthew chapter five, "Happy are the pure in heart: they shall see God", also in chapter twelve, "For a man's words flow out of what fill his heart"; and in the Gospel of Luke chapter five, "What are these thoughts you have in your hearts?", and chapter twelve, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be". St. Paul also mentions the heart of man at least in fifty occasions in his epistles.⁴ "The heart is the wellspring of life, and is the source of our feelings and decisions, of our thinking and of what we want, what we say and do: our external behavior is determined by this interior center."⁵

In the Old Testament God is portrayed as a pure spirit and therefore had no physical heart or body, but in scripture there are many instances where the Heart of God is mentioned. It is the spiritual Heart of God that is revealed to us, to communicate to the people of God His truths, His attributes, His desires, and more importantly His divine and merciful love for us.⁶ In the first book of Samuel chapter thirteen we read: "Yahweh has searched out a man for himself after His own Heart"; in Psalm thirty three it is stated, "Yahweh's plans hold good for ever, the intentions of His Heart from age to age"; and in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter forty eight, God himself says, "That is why my heart sobs like a flute fro Moab" In the New Testament the spiritual Heart of God has become Incarnate. Not only is the Heart of God revealed to us spiritually, but also physically. On various occasions Jesus speaks of His own heart, for example in the Gospel of Matthew chapter eleven Jesus is quoted as saying, "Shoulder my yoke and learn form me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls". St. Paul speaks of the Heart of Christ explicitly, in one translation of the Holy Bible he states, "For God is my witness how I long for you all in the heart of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1, 8). St. John, the most beloved disciple of Christ, also reveals to us the heart of Christ in his gospel, even though not explicitly.⁷

"God who 'dwells in unapproachable light,' wants to communicate His own divine life to the men he freely created, in order to adopt them as His sons in His only-begotten Son. By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to Him, and of knowing Him, and of loving Him far beyond their own natural capacity".⁸

As mentioned above the heart of man reveals his interior being, who he is, likewise in the Old Testament, God spoke to His people revealing who He was, "I am who I am" (Ex 3, 14). Therefore, it would be logical to say that God revealed His Heart to His people. God wished to form a covenant with His people, to redeem them, and so He gave to them norms to follow, explicitly the ten commandments. He did not only physically give them rules to live by, but He also spoke intimately to His chosen people by way of His prophets. Throughout the whole Old Testament, one can see how God wished to communicate with His people, how He

has set His heart on us. He has set His heart on His people because He wishes to save them and give them His merciful love. He is the one “who molds every heart” (Ps 33,15).⁹

If God molds every heart, then the human heart should only be content when it is doing the will of his Creator. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read: “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for”.¹⁰ Man never ceases to search for God who is love (1 Jn 4, 8) as St. Augustine states, “for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you”.¹¹

The search for God initiates the moment we are created, but this search can many times be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected by man.¹² In the first book of the Holy Bible, the Book of Genesis, we are recounted the story of creation. We learn how God created us and He “saw it was good”. God created Adam and Eve in perfection and He loved them. Immediately we see that man was given certain rules to follow and that when left by himself to choose what to do, he goes against the wishes of God, he turns away from His Heart. As creation continued to expand and generations of Adam followed, God saw the wickedness of the human heart and was saddened. The condition of the human heart came to such great wickedness and rebellion against God, that “Yahweh regretted having made man on earth, and his heart grieved” (Gn 6, 6). What followed was the destruction of creation with the Great Flood.

After the flood, man did not really change, he still did not wish to comply with the Heart of God. “Yahweh said in His Heart... never again will I curse the earth because of man, because his heart contrives evil from his infancy” (Gn 8, 21). Soon after we see the building of the Tower of Babel where we can clearly see the pride and idolatrous behavior of God’s people. Because of their sinfulness Yahweh confuses their language and disperses them over the whole face of the earth (Gn 11, 8-9). For God was displeased with man, but His love for them was much greater. God in His merciful love makes a covenant with His servant, Noah. He tells Noah that never again will He destroy the earth by flood (Gn 9, 11). In this covenant we also see that it is a promise to reunite His chosen people; one day He will “gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (Jn 11, 15).

In order to gather together his chosen people, God calls Abraham. Abraham is a man who has been tested in his faith and has won admiration from Yahweh. He is a man who trusts in God’s promises and is obedient to His commands. God promises Abraham that He will make him a great nation and bless those who bless him (Gn 12, 1-3). Abraham will be the father, in flesh, of God’s chosen people, through his descendants a great nation will be formed and one day gathered together again.¹³ Abraham’s descendants “would be the trustees of the promise made to the patriarchs, ...called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church”.¹⁴

In the book of the Exodus we are recounted the story of the people of Israel fleeing from Egypt. We specifically are encountered with Moses, a prophet who God chooses to fulfill the desires of His Heart. In Moses one sees the response that all men should have towards God. Even though he did not have the courage, he was faithful to God’s will, which gave him the fortitude necessary to lead the people of God out of Egypt. God revealed to Moses the desires of His heart, and Moses responded by fulfilling them.

Through Moses, God gave the people of Israel, His people, the law. He established with them a new covenant, so that they would recognize and serve Him as the one living and true God.¹⁵ The Israelites did not have the same faith in God as did their leader Moses. They were to live forty years traveling to the promised land, and within those forty years there were many occasions in which they turned away from God. They were “wandering in the desert, but their hearts were equally wandering, not ready to enter the way of Yahweh”.¹⁶

Throughout their pilgrimage they broke almost every law that was given to them in the Decalogue, at Mount Sinai. They did not trust that God was going to provide all the needed in the desert, to such a degree that they stated that they were better off in Egypt being slaves (Ex 16, 3). They made a golden calf and revered it as a God, they became an idolatrous nation (Ex 32, 4). It was a direct sin against the first commandment. “I am the Lord your God, you should have no God except me” (Ex 20, 2). This was not the first or last time that the Israelites committed adultery against God.¹⁷ Some texts in Scripture that speak of idolatry are: “When Solomon grew old his wives swayed his heart to other gods” (1 K 11, 3), and “I hope to touch the heart of the House of Israel who have deserted me in favor of a pack of idols” (Ez 14, 5). God’s

chosen people began to break the alliance that God had made with them. "I will be your God and you shall be my people" (Lv 26,12).

Nevertheless, love is the victor over anger in Yahweh's compassionate Heart. This is clearly shown in the book of the prophet Hosea, chapter eleven, verses eight through nine:

"Ephraim, how could I part with you? Israel, how could I give you up?
How could I treat you like Admah, or deal with you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils from it, my whole being trembles at the thought.
I will not give rein to my fierce anger, I will not destroy Ephraim again,
for I am God, not man: I am the Holy One in your midst
and have no wish to destroy."

Israel, as seen in the book of Hosea, has been disloyal to God. God is sad, disappointed, and angry with His People, because the more He called to them the further they turned away from Him. "The more I called to them, the further they went from me; they have offered sacrifice to the Baals and set their offerings smoking before the idols" (Ho 11, 2). But anger does not prevail in God's Heart, love does, "for I am God, not man: I am the Holy One in your midst and have no wish to destroy" (Ho 11, 9). The Heart of God is full of love for His people. He is the faithful, long-suffering husband who calls back His unfaithful wife, the people of Israel, "behold I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart (Ho 2, 16). God not only calls back His unfaithful wife, but He wishes to make a new covenant with her, a heart to heart covenant with His people. ¹⁸

This new covenant did not yet take place. We see in scripture how the people of Israel were still struggling to be faithful to the desires of God. Jeremiah and Ezekiel, two prophets who lived during the Babylonian exile of the Israelites, prophesied to the people of Judah and Jerusalem that they would be destroyed because they had broken the covenant made with God. ¹⁹ Yahweh speaks to Jeremiah and tells him to tell the people of Jerusalem and Judah, "I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I solemnly warned them, and have persistently warned them until today: Listen to my voice. But they did not listen to me, they did not pay attention; everyone followed the dictates of his own evil heart. So, I fulfilled against them all the words of this covenant which I had ordained for them to obey and which they had not obeyed" (Jr 11, 8). In the prophet Ezekiel we read, "As I live, I swear: my oath which he has ignored, my treaty which he has broken, I will make them both recoil on his own head.... I mean to take him to Babylon and punish him there for breaking his covenant with me" (Ez 17, 19-20).

Once again we will see the everlasting love of God, for the God of Jeremiah is a God who passionately loves his people, and who cannot sit back and allow them to go astray. What they do matters to Him. He not only invites them back when they go astray, but he lets them experience the consequences of their evil deeds. The purpose of allowing their suffering, however is not their destruction, but repentance "Yahweh wants them to return to Him." ²⁰

Specifically in the book of the prophet Jeremiah we see how God communicates to His people that He wishes to form a new covenant with them. God tells His people that He will give them a new heart. No longer will they have a "heart of stone", but rather they will now acquire a "heart of flesh". Instead of an "uncircumcised heart" now they will have their hearts circumcised. "Circumcise yourselves for Yahweh; off with the foreskin of your hearts" (Jr 4:4). God Himself will circumcise their hearts, so that they will be able to repent.

The change of heart is presented as a gift given freely by God. A gift which the Israelites did not deserve, but God's Heart desires. In Jeremiah chapter thirty-one we read:

"See, the days are coming... when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel but not a covenant like the one I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, so I had to show them who was master. No, this is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel when those days arrive... Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their God and they shall be my people... They will all know me, the least no less than the greatest."

God will soon form the covenant within the hearts of His people. No longer will stone tablets represent the

covenant, now their lives will be the testimony of God's love for them. He will write the laws in their hearts. They shall truly be God's people and everybody will "know Yahweh".²¹ It is a covenant distinguished from the old covenant, not because the laws have changed but because of its radical interiority. "The Lord will transform the minds of His people so that they will be able to live in joyous harmony with His will".²²

Jeremiah did not explicitly mention the words "new heart" in his prophecies, but this terminology could definitely be applied to the words God spoke to His people, through him. It is the prophet Ezekiel who explicitly mentions the words "new heart". "Shake off all the sins you have committed against me, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit" (Ez 18:31). The heart of stone is the old heart hardened by sin. The new heart is a heart of flesh, a truly human heart, pliable to the will of God, faithful to God's Law, open to God and to one's neighbor. In the book of Ezekiel chapter eleven we see God making the covenant with His people:

"The Lord Yahweh says this: I will gather you together from the peoples, I will bring you all back from the countries where you have been scattered and I will give you the land of Israel. They will come and will purge it of all the horrors and the filthy practices. I will give them a single heart and I will put a new spirit in them; I will remove the heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh instead, so that they will keep my laws and respect my observances and put them into practice. Then they shall be my people and I will be their God."

The prophet Ezekiel does not only speak of acquiring a new heart but also of having a greater sensitivity to God's presence within His people. God promises that His spirit will dwell permanently within his people (Ez 36, 27-28). God will give us this "new spirit" but the people of Israel must also respond by consenting to the transforming action of God in their hearts.²³

In this prophetic book we also see the image of dry bones acquiring life by the breath of God. "The Lord Yahweh says this to these bones: I am now going to make the breath enter you, and you will live. I shall put sinews on you, I shall make flesh grow on you, I shall cover you with skin and give you breath, and you will live; and you will learn that I am Yahweh" (Ez 37, 5-7). The people of Israel are the dry bone, who after breaking the covenant with Yahweh no longer are in His friendship and are at the point of death because of their sinfulness. With the "new covenant" God will give His people the breath of life, His spirit, His love in order for them to remain faithful to the new covenant.

Throughout the history of the exile we see how it is a repetitive story of God calling His people to repentance and to a covenant of love with Him, and how the people of God answer His call but as time goes by they fall back on their promises and turn away from God. Man is unfaithful, but God is never unfaithful and He always searches for those leaders and shepherds who will be faithful to Him, even to the point of death, to bring His flock back to Him. "Yahweh has searched out a man for himself after his own heart and designated him leader of His people" (1 S 13, 14). In the first book of the Maccabees chapter two, there is a listing of those who had a burning fervor for the Law and gave their lives for the covenant with God. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, David, Elijah, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael, and Daniel, were some of those who trusted and did the will of God. "They are raised up by God, searched out, given to the people; and they find their guideline in the Heart of God, not merely in the tablets of stone".²⁴

One can say that around the second and first centuries B.C. (before Christ), the New Covenant began to really take effect, it was not fulfilled, but history recounts for us that during this time a number of God's faithful became martyrs in doing the will of God. "The book of Daniel is a textbook on martyrdom in the highest sense of the term"²⁵ and in the books of the Maccabees we are able to witness those Israelites who truly were defenders of the faith and by obeying the Law, praying and sacrificing themselves they lived for the Kingdom of God and not for the world.

There were those who were killed for being faithful to God's laws, and yet the people of God were still lost in their sin. What else could God do to lure His people back to Him? Would God give up on His creation? Absolutely not! God's love will be victorious even during the worst infidelities. Not only did God receive the martyrdom of His prophets for the salvation of His people, He became the Martyr of martyrs. "The word became flesh" (Jn 1:14) for our salvation. "The Word became flesh for us in order to save us by reconciling us with God."²⁶ For God is love" (1 Jn 4, 8) and there is no greater love, than he who lays down for his friends (Jn 15, 13). God being of divine nature also became human to suffer and die for His creation, to pay

for all the injustices done unto Him, to reconcile His creation with Himself.

In the New Testament the prophecies of the Old Testament would be accomplished. In many instances in the Old Testament we were foretold that a Savior would be born for the salvation of God's people. In the Gospel of Matthew there are cited to prophecies from the Old Testament, Isaiah chapter 7, "the Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel", and from the book of Micah chapter 5, "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel." This savior would be God himself, Jesus Christ the only Son of the Father. The world would now be able to encounter the physical Heart of God. No longer will God only have to speak through the hearts of His prophets, now He will reveal to us His physical and divine Heart. This Divine Heart will make its creation more conscious of its sinful nature and attitudes, and either His children will ask for pardon and mercy and find peace or they will reject Him and become His enemies.

God came down from heaven, and by the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary. Now it was time for God's promises to be fulfilled, for the New Covenant to be accomplished and impressed in the hearts of His people. Mary is the first of God's creature to enter into the New Covenant with Jesus. For as many of the Church Fathers say Mary first conceived Christ in Her heart and then in Her womb.²⁷

The Virgin Mary was the perfect creature God had prepared to complete His promise of salvation. She was the Immaculate Virgin, since Her conception, that would be the bearer of Christ to the world. For Mary was a true joy in the eyes of God, She was the full of grace, the perfect Virgin in the midst of a sinful creation, because where sin abounded grace over abounded (Rm 5, 20).

For nine months She not only carried the Savior in Her womb, but She let Herself be His instrument, the instrument of the Holy Spirit. When she visited Her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Why should I be honored with a visit from the Mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy" (Lk 1, 43-44). The child in Elizabeth's womb was Saint John the Baptist, who was sanctified by Mary's visit to become the precursor, sent to prepare the way for the coming of Christ, for the establishment of the New Covenant.²⁸

Yet, from His conception Christ, the son of God would also be rejected by His people. When it was time for the Virgin Mary to give birth, no one opened their homes to receive Her. The people's hearts were not opened to the Holy Spirit, they had hardened hearts. For if their hearts were opened to God they would have recognized that Christ was in the womb of Mary as Elizabeth did. Instead the people of Bethlehem closed their doors to Christ, and the King of Kings had to be born in a cold and humble manger.

Not only did God's people reject Him when He was an innocent child, but they even set out to kill Him. When Herod, who was the King of Judah, heard from the Magi that the King of the Jews was to be born in Bethlehem, he immediately wanted to visit Him. His intentions were to kill Jesus, because this meant that his own kingship was at an end. When the Magi did not return to Herod, he was furious and sent an order to kill all children who were two years old or under in Bethlehem and its surrounding districts (Mt 2, 16). This would not be the first time that His people attempted against His life.

When Christ began His public ministry, He began to reveal His Heart to His people in preparation for the entrance into the New Covenant. Not only would He reveal His heart to Israel, but to all nations. Everyone is called to enter into the Kingdom of God, but to enter the Kingdom there had to be a complete transformation. Jesus says to the people, "the time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News" (Mk 1, 15). The "Good News" which was Jesus himself, its messenger and its message.

Jesus states that He has not come to abolish the law of the Old Covenant and the prophets, but to fulfill it (Mt 5, 17). He has come to perfect the Law and bring it to its fulfillment. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals the hidden potential and demands of the Old Law, He reveals their entire divine and human truth. He "does not add new external precepts, but proceeds to reform the heart, the root of human acts, where man chooses between the pure and the impure".²⁹ If one chooses correctly than they will be able to achieve the beatitudes, which are the promises of the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus has come to reveal to us the entire law which He calls the "new commandment", "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15, 12). He who is love reveals to His creation that true happiness comes when one learns to love God above all things and one another. God directs the hearts of his people to its origin, for we were created out of love, to love, and for love.

Many began to follow Jesus, some as the twelve apostles were called to be with Him and participate in His divine mission. They were men who had great faith and who would continue Christ's mission on earth. There were also those, that from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry wanted to destroy Him. For example, the Pharisees, partisans of Herod, priests and scribes. They were not content with Jesus, for He used to expel demons, forgive sins, heal on the Sabbath, had familiarity with tax collectors and sinners, and in their minds went against the essential institutions of the Chosen People.³⁰

Jesus continued to preach the Good News with His apostles, healing many who were sick, spiritually and physically, performing miracles, and bringing many to a true conversion and faith in God. Christ was preparing the way to complete the will of His Father. The time was approaching for the blood of the New Covenant to be shed and for the Heart of God to be completely revealed. It is Saint John the Apostle who gives us a greater insight to this preparation in his Gospel. Saint John was the beloved disciple of Jesus, he is the one that rested on Jesus' bosom, and he is the one to present to us the Heart of Christ. The Heart that would become the source of living water, the living waters that will purify the sinful hearts of men and turn them into new and purified hearts by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament there are numerous accounts where flowing waters are mentioned in reference to purification. Water is seen as a symbol of life and fertility it represents divine life and God's blessing.³¹ For example: In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, God says to His people, "I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols" (Ez 36, 25); "Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty" (Is 55, 1); and in the book of Jeremiah we see how God speaks of His rejection by His own people, "they have abandoned me, the fountain of living water" (Jr 2, 13). Water is often used to symbolize the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This is the promise that God has given to His people, the promise of giving them a "new spirit". Jesus Christ will be the one to fulfill this promise at the appointed time. In the Gospel of John, chapter 7, we see how Christ himself reiterates the promise of His Father:

"On the last day and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood there and cried out: 'if any man is thirsty, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me!' As scripture says: From his breast shall flow fountains of living water. He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified."

We also see in Jesus' discourse with the Samaritan women as He proclaims Himself the source of living water: "anyone who drinks the water I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4, 14). Jesus' Heart is the redemptive mystery, the source of new life for all of us, we are invited to approach His Heart and drink.³²

As stated in the previous quote it still was not time for the glorification of the Son of God, but it was soon approaching and as this time approached the Pharisees also grew in greater anger towards Jesus. When it was time for the festivities of Passover the chief priests gathered together with the elders and Caiaphas, the high priest, "and made plans to arrest Jesus by some trick and have him put to death" (Mt 26, 3-5). Jesus knew what was in the mind of the Jews and in the last supper He said, "Father, the hour has come glorify your Son, so that your Son may glorify you" (Jn 17, 1).

Knowing that His hour had come to return to the Father, in the course of a meal he washed his apostles' feet and gave them the commandment of love. He also wished to leave them with a pledge of His love, and therefore instituted the Eucharist so that He may always remain with them.³³ "The Lord Jesus took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it, and he said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me'. In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me'" (1 Co 11, 24-25). God gave His total self to His people, He gave His Heart for the salvation of the world. Many fathers of the Church and Popes have associated the Eucharist as an immolation of the Heart of Christ for the salvation of His people. Pope Leo the XIII is quoted in the Encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* as saying that Our Redeemer performed the supreme act of love, pouring forth all the riches of His Heart, when He instituted the adorable sacrament of the Eucharist in order to remain in our midst to the end of time.³⁴ The institution of the Eucharist was Jesus manifesting his divine love for His people, He said: "I have longed to eat this Passover with you" (Lk 22, 5). "For 'not the smallest portion of His heart is the Eucharist which He gave us from the overflowing love of His Heart."³⁵

So much was the evil in man's heart, that at this most holy moment where Christ was giving Himself to us, in the heart of one of his closest friends, in the heart of Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' apostle, the devil entered. Judas would be the one to betray Jesus and turn Him over to the chief priests. He went to the chief priests and said, "What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you? They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray him" (Mt 26, 14-16). Jesus knew the intentions of Judas and that night He was troubled in spirit and declared, "I tell you most solemnly, one of you will betray me... [and then said to Judas] What you are going to do, do quickly" (Jn 13, 21-27).

Now was the time for Jesus' glorification. When Judas had left the table Christ said "now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon" (Jn 13, 31-32). Soon after Jesus and His disciples went to Gethsemani to pray. During Jesus' prayer He accepts the cup of the New Covenant from His Father's hands, making Himself "obedient until death".³⁶ Christ is then turned over to the chief priests where He would be questioned (Mt 26, 62-64) and by the cries and shouts of Israel, His chosen people, Jesus Christ was sent to be crucified; "Crucify him, Crucify him!" (Mk 15,14).

The Savior was crucified. Finally the Son of God completed the mission He was sent for. He redeemed sinful humanity and paid for all its offenses against God. The Son of God was glorified and the Heart of God was opened in completion of the promise of the covenant, "I will give them a new heart", His own Heart. Saint John the evangelist narrates the event:

"When they came to Jesus, they found he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. This is the evidence of one who saw it-trustworthy evidence, and he knows he speaks the truth- and he gives it so that you may believe as well. Because all this happened to fulfil the words of scripture: 'Not one bone of his will be broken'; and again in another place scripture says: 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced'" (Jn 19, 33-37).

Two other scripture readings that prophesied the piercing of Jesus' Heart are: the suffering servant in Isaiah, "he was pierced through our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed"(Is 53, 5); and from the book of Zechariah chapter thirteen, "When that day comes, a fountain will be opened for the House of David and Jerusalem, [to cleanse them from] sin and impurity". The day of cleansing is the day when men shall see the pierced heart, and it was precisely on the day of crucifixion that the cleansing waters of forgiveness and redemption poured forth.³⁷ "The seeing of the Pierced one [was and] is a source of lamentation which leads to faith, love and conversion".³⁸

In the Old Testament blood was seen as something sacred, the seat of life. It was forbidden to drink blood, instead it was used to purify and cleanse from all faults and to consecrate and dedicate one's life to God. The blood of the victim atoned for the sins of the people.³⁹ The blood that poured forth in the piercing of Christ's heart shows that the "lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1, 29), has truly been sacrificed.

The piercing of Christ's Heart was the completion of His sacrifice for the salvation of Humanity. By seeing the Pierced One, whose side is opened on the Cross, men are drawn to faith in love.⁴⁰ This is exactly what happened to St. Thomas the Apostle. After not believing that Christ had resurrected and appeared to the other apostles, Jesus appeared to St. Thomas and told him, "put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe. Thomas replied, My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20, 27-28). The Lord showed His open Heart to St. Thomas and also to all humanity to strengthen our faith and love and to lead us into the sanctuary of his love.⁴¹ Christ Himself proclaimed: "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself"(Jn 12, 32).

The promise of the "new spirit" was also to be completed. God would send His spirit among His people, the Holy Spirit:

"When Pentecost day came round, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." (Ac 2, 1-4).

"The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit." The Spirit prepares men and gives them the graces needed to draw them to Christ. "The Spirit manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls his word to them and opens their minds to the understanding of His Death and Resurrection."⁴²

After Pentecost the Apostles spread out to take the Good News to the people and to build the Church of Christ. "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (Mt 28, 19-20). St. Paul is one of Christ's disciples that after a deep conversion, set out to teach the people the ways of the Lord. He preached that all men had to be renewed and become Christ like.⁴³ Many were converted. God had deposited in the hearts of men the Holy Spirit, (cf. Rm 5, 5) and Christ abided in their hearts (cf. Ef 3, 17). In those who were pure and humble of heart God manifested His power and presence. This conversion would also require much suffering. All of the Apostles and many of their disciples were persecuted and martyred because of their faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. It was also difficult to remain faithful since as Saint Peter warned in his second letter, chapter 2: "you will have false teachers, who will insinuate their own disruptive views and disown the Master who purchased their freedom... there will be many who copy their shameful behavior and the Way of Truth will be brought into disrepute on their account." Yet, the New Covenant was established and Christ had made a promise to Peter, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it" (Mt 16, 13-18). At the end the Church, the Heart of God, will always be triumphant.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church beautifully describes the Heart of the Incarnate Word using a quote from Pius XII encyclical *Haurietis aquas*: "Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony, and his Passion and gave himself up for each one of us: 'The Son of God...loved me and gave himself for me' (Ga 2, 20). He has loved us all with a human heart. For this reason, The Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation, (Jn 19,34), 'is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that ... love with which the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings' without exception" (# 478).

As we have seen throughout the Old and New Testament, God continues to invite humanity to a communion with Him. He continues to reveal His Heart to all those who wish to seek Him and fill the desire for God which is present in all human hearts.⁴⁴ Even when man disobeyed God and lost his friendship, He did not abandon him to the power of death... Again and again He offered a covenant to man.⁴⁵ The last promise recorded in the Bible that God made to His people, offers salvation and hope for those who wish to seek Him.⁴⁶ In the Book of Revelations, chapter 21, we read: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give water from the well of life free to anybody who is thirsty... and I will be His God and he a son to me."

Hopefully we will be among the huge number of people that were impossible for St. John the Apostle to count, standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and with palms in their hands praising God. Hopefully we will be, among the people who have been through the great persecution and have washed their robes' white again in the blood of the Lamb and who will never thirst again nor the scorching heat will never plague them, because the Lamb will be their shepherd and will lead them to springs of living water; and God will wipe all tears from their eyes (Rv 7, 14-17).

¹ Bovenmars, Jan G. *A Biblical Spirituality of the Heart*. Alba House, N.Y., 1991; p. xx.

² Webster's Third New International Dictionary. Merriam-Webster Inc. Springfield, MA, 1986; p. 1044.

³ Encyclopedia of Catholicism. Harper Collins. San Francisco, CA, 1995; p. 604.

⁴ O'Donnell, Timothy T. *Heart of the Redeemer*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, 1989; p. 37-8.

⁵ Bovenmars, op. cit., p. 1

⁶ O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 26

⁷ Ibid., p. 37

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, U.S.A., 1994, # 52

⁹ Bovenmars, op. cit., p. 27

¹⁰ Catechism, op. cit., # 27

¹¹ St. Augustine, Conf. 1,1,1:PI 32, 659-661.

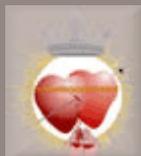
¹² Catechism, op. cit., # 29

¹³ Duggan, Micheal. *The Consuming Fire*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, 1991; p. 90-91.

¹⁴ Catechism, op. cit., # 60.

- ¹⁵ Catechism, op. cit., # 62.
¹⁶ Bovenmars, op. cit., p. 41.
¹⁷ Bovenmars, op. cit., p. 47.
¹⁸ Ibid, p. 34.
¹⁹ Duggan, Micheal. The Consuming Fire. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, 1991; p. 106.
²⁰ Bovenmars, op. cit., p. 31
²¹ Ibid., p. 63.
²² Duggan, op. cit., 299.
²³ Duggan, op. cit., 313.
²⁴ Bovenmars, op. cit., p. 37.
²⁵ Duggan, op. cit., p. 486.
²⁶ Cathecism, op. cit., # 457.
²⁷ Nuevo Diccionario de Mariologia. Ediciones Pulinas, Madrid, España, 1988; p. 1197.
²⁸ Catechism, op. cit., # 523
²⁹ Catechism, op. cit., # 1968
³⁰ Catechism, op. cit., # 574-576
³¹ Sister Mary Jeremiah, OP. The Secret of the Heart. Christendom Press, Front Royal, VA, 1995; p. 23.
³² Bovenmars, op. cit., p. 98.
³³ Cathecism, op. cit., #1337
³⁴ Pope Puis XII, Haurietis Aquas. St. Paul Editions, Boston, MA; p. 41.
³⁵ Ibid., p. 41.
³⁶ Cathecism, op. cit., # 612
³⁷ O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 49.
³⁸ Ibid, p. 48.
³⁹ Sister Mary Jeremiah, op. cit., p. 24-25.
⁴⁰ O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 48.
⁴¹ Ibid, p. 42.
⁴² Cathecism, op. cit., # 737.
⁴³ Bovenmars, op. cit., p. 115.
⁴⁴ Cathecism, op. cit., # 27.
⁴⁵ Roman Missal. Eucharistic Prayer IV, 118.
⁴⁶ O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 44.

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