

THE HEARTS OF JESUS AND MARY

"Lord, I love the house where you dwell, and the place where your glory abides" (Ps 26:8); but what is this house where the Lord dwells if not the very throne of God and of the Lamb, from which flows a river of living water, clear as crystal? (cf. Rev 22:1). The Heart of Christ is the place where his thoughts, which endure for every generation for those who love him (cf. Ps 33:11), become the flesh of Christ, his life, his gestures, his silences, his words, his wounds, his weeping, his joy. It is the humus, so to speak, from which his ineffable being springs forth, which becomes sayable to us; the sealed scroll that is unveiled by his whole life and whose seals the Spirit opens; the volume of God's decrees, like Wisdom incarnate herself, who knows and understands all things (cf. Wis 9:11). And so the Heart of Christ remains a splendid metaphor or symbol to indicate the concentration, or the first wellspring, of everything he said, did and, above all (when he could no longer say or do anything, especially in the Passion) intimately felt. It is the root and the fulfilment of his whole divine and human being, and in it are truly enclosed all the mysteries revealed to us of God and of his kingdom: that length, height, breadth and depth which in turn dwells in our heart (cf. Eph 3:18). And of this one can know only in the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:14): but "we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (1 Cor 2:12).

But it is not an abstract symbol: the heart, or breast, or bosom (these are images that overlap, chase and reflect one another, and Scripture is full of them) is bodily, I would say anthropologically, significant, like the face, or the gaze. The heart is truly a heart, even if we do not consider it from an anatomical or scientific-descriptive point of view, but rather a metaphorical, allusive one, exceeding pure description or material analysis. That is, it is not a symbol in the way a road sign is, which is abstract, but possesses a constitutively and ineliminably real dimension. Only that the underlying *res* is understood not in the quantitative and descriptive sense, the one more familiar to us, namely that of the scientific reading of things, for which, for example, water is hydrogen and oxygen, nothing more (physicalist reductionism), but in a qualitative and allusive-evocative sense: hence its greater significance.

Religious language, like poetic language, is in fact not descriptive but symbolic. That is, it joins, puts together, many realities, enclosing them as in a fan, and opening them in their varied complexity around a pivot, let us say, that joins and unifies them. The symbol, as is well known, gives food for thought and for this reason is potentially inexhaustible. To speak, then, of the Heart of Jesus means truly having before us the flesh of the Saviour, that flesh which, impressed by the Spirit of God and eternally turned toward his Father (cf. Jn 1:1), renders his Word precisely expressed, that is, legible by us and for us: "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). It means, with the beloved disciple, placing ourselves before the culminating scene of his Gospel, the piercing, and seeing in it the summit of revelation, and at the same time the first wellspring, that from which everything

began, the alpha and the omega, precisely those thoughts of his heart: "Great and wonderful are your deeds, Lord God Almighty, just and true are your ways, King of the nations [...] your righteous judgments have been revealed" (cf. Rev 15:3-4). The Heart of Christ, in fact, gives itself to be contemplated in everything he says, does, lives. His Heart is the place where everything germinates, everything begins, everything grows to its fulfilment, that is, at the end, on the cross, where "it is finished" (Jn 19:30: *tetélestai*). And here closes the chiasmus begun with "he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1: *eis télos*). Thus the whole narrative of the Passion makes explicit that end or fulfilment of love: moreover, we must not forget that in the Gospels the whole account of the life of Jesus, the infancy as well as the preaching of the kingdom, contains, as in a seed, in small letters, what in capital letters is narrated in his passion, death and resurrection. For it is Christ who takes upon himself the sin of the world, who bears our sorrows and our sufferings, so that the signs of healing, forgiveness and liberation announced in the Gospels are recounted not out of curiosity or historical completeness, but as a proclamation of faith in what the hearers already believed because they had experienced it personally, that is, Easter, of which those signs are only, so to speak, an anticipated manifestation, a foretaste of its effects. Truly, in every line of the Gospels, and of Scripture in general, the mystery of the Heart of Christ, his thoughts, pulses, works and vibrates: "He forgives all your iniquities, heals all your diseases, redeems your life from the pit, crowns you with grace and mercy" (Ps 103:3-4).

But we must avoid falling into a misunderstanding. Up to now, as is inevitable, we have spoken of the heart of Christ as attested by Scripture: the possible misunderstanding is that this description be confused with what it really is. Let me explain: just as a heart drawn in a medical atlas is only a figure, not the reality of a real heart, the one doctors actually deal with, so the Heart of Christ is a living experience of it, not a description or attestation of faith. This is only a figure: "the reality is Christ" (Col 2:17), and I invite you to take this statement in the most radical sense possible.

We must always be careful, above all those of us who deal with theology, not to confuse our ideas about God, our reasonings, with Him, who is *semper maior*, greater than every fine discourse of ours. Otherwise we would end up venerating idols, which our ideas precisely are; whereas it is right to venerate images, inasmuch as they refer us to a reality. But reality is not our ideas about reality. In this sense, the Heart of Christ offers itself to each one in the living experience of prayer, of listening to his word, of Eucharistic adoration, in which that Heart is living bread, in the personal and incommunicable experience of his fidelity, of that *hesed* or tenderness that speaks to each of us, without which no discourse makes sense. Not for nothing (since we are on French territory) Saint John Paul II, visiting the Basilica of Montmartre, proclaimed it a national sanctuary of the Sacred Heart, of the divine mercy and of perpetual adoration. In so doing he not only showed the profound unity of the three expressions, grafted onto a single *res*, but also refers us inescapably to a personal experience.

Which is as much as to say that one can speak of it only starting from a surplus of meaning that one has experienced, as if to put into words or give the reasons for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pet 3:14). Only that at this vital point we necessarily leave a conference, to enter rather a spiritual diary, such as Saint Margaret Mary or Saint Faustina Kowalska wrote. Indeed, this is the meaning of a homily or conference: to lead to a living experience of a reality greater than our words, which remains entrusted first of all to our free will, accidentally, or insofar as it depends on us, in our greater or lesser availability, and, in this respect instead substantially, to the gift of the Spirit, to the measure of grace granted to each. But as you understand, this is precisely the point that is no longer up to me, before which I must stop.

We must now consider the other theme of this meeting, the Heart of Most Holy Mary. On this, I would say that the methodology, or the line of reflection we follow, is the same. It is a matter first of all of starting from Scripture, and from there arriving at life; from our experience we will then return to Scripture, that is, to the experience that others have had and recounted, and so always going and returning, in a virtuous circle moved by the Spirit. The same Spirit who moves the sacred authors is present and at work in us, in the Church: it is he who writes the word, but also who writes our lives, in that new writing, that work in progress which is our existence, or, we might say, "the Gospel according to me". The Spirit, in fact, as to them, so also to us, recalls, even in the deepest sense of making us understand, what Jesus has already told us, and reveals it still, Revelation being not only complete (and it certainly is, in the sense of public revelation) but also *in fieri*, in continual becoming, as Revelation is in our lives, which is also the Revelation, to ourselves, of our lives to ourselves. Indeed, as an author very dear to me, whom I am grateful to recall here, G. Bernanos, observes, faith is not only the one way to knowledge of God, but also of ourselves in Him.

Thus Scripture, as is well known, uses the term "heart" to indicate the deepest self, the first wellspring of personality, the intimate identity of each person, which is manifested precisely by what one says and does in one's life, according to that *agere sequitur esse* which we have already mentioned. As already for Jesus, and also for others, for example in the Old Testament expression "the heart of the people", or more individual ones, "heart" expresses the hendiadys, symbolic and not descriptive, of intellect and will as the fundamental and identity-defining powers of man. Thus Mary "treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19), in a context, that of the nativity, in which many find, see, hear, marvel, report: one seems to read, behind the Lucan plot, the beginning of John's letter: "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have touched, concerning the word of life, for the life was made visible" (1 Jn 1:1-2).

For this reason, if already at the Annunciation Mary is presented to us par excellence as the Virgin of listening, the authentic incarnation of that *Shema Israel*, being the daughter of Zion par excellence to whom Zephaniah in reality speaks: "Rejoice, daughter of Zion, exult, Israel, and be glad with all your heart, daughter of

Jerusalem" (Zeph 3:14), we understand that this initial moment thickens and becomes pregnant with what is seen, heard, contemplated, narrated, shared, celebrated. Joy fills her heart as much as the Spirit fills her; indeed, he has always perfectly filled her and continues to dwell in her in fullness, making her the sanctuary of the Covenant (cf. Lk 1:35, to be read in parallel with Ex 40:34) according to the sense of that well-pondered perfect participle *kecharitoméne* (Lk 1:28). One can well say that in her we see exactly that "abiding in Him" which has such prominence in John's narrative. And since the Spirit fills her, he fills her with his fruit, namely, according to Gal 5:22: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, understood as the full mastery of the Spirit over her person. We can well say that her heart pours all this forth, and the Magnificat is an example of it, but also spreads it around her, from the Visitation onward. We do not have time to speak of it as we should, but the Spirit is the key to understanding Mary's action, from Cana to the cross to her presence in the first Christian community. And from there onward this continues, throughout the whole history of the Church, in the lived experience of the Christian people, which is also expressed as my personal experience, my encounter with her, without which, as we have already said, everything else would be only words or ideas, even religious ones, more or less erudite.

As with Jesus, so with Mary we must still bring the reasoning to its end. And it ends not in itself, as representation, but in that living reality, the person of Mary not described but encountered, risen with the Risen One, and like Him, for Him, and in Him, perpetually alive in the mystical body of the Church. From the Risen One, perpetually alive and life-giving in the Spirit, we understand and experience the reality of Mary, of her Heart, as living, as the place where the glory of God dwells, the dwelling of his presence, his temple and his seat. And from here come her manifold relations with us, with the whole Church and with each one. Thus Saint Cyril, in his Commentary on the Gospel of John, book 11, 11, PG 74, 559-562, observes that "if all of us are members of the same body in Christ, and not only among ourselves but also with him who is in us through his flesh, it is evident that we are all one thing both among ourselves and in Christ [...]. All of us, having received one and the same Holy Spirit, are in a certain way united both among ourselves and with God. For although, taken separately, we are many, and Christ makes the Spirit of the Father and his own dwell in each of us, yet the Spirit is one and indivisible. He, by his presence and action, gathers into unity spirits that are distinct and separate from one another. He makes of all of us in himself one and the same thing."

This is why the Heart of Mary is one with the Heart of Christ, because the Spirit is the same; and this is also why Mary, according to a beautiful expression of Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, is formed in us, and we are formed in her by the action of the same Spirit. This is why the soul, according to an expression dear to the Carmelite tradition, notably Marie Petit, is intrinsically Marian or "Mary-formed": the Spirit in fact forms in us souls like hers, as a mould, again

according to Montfort, forms as many forms identical to the first. And yet Jesus is Jesus, Mary remains herself, not a pipe or channel or, worse, a medium, through which the Spirit of Jesus would flow without activating anything of her humanity, real and distinct from that of Jesus. Jesus is Jesus, Mary is Mary, we are and remain ourselves: but the Spirit of Jesus draws out, so to speak, the best of us from us, makes us be what we truly are, refashioning us according to the original image and likeness. All the more so in her who is the Immaculate.

The Spirit flows throughout the Church, and gives life to all of it: the Spirit of Jesus flows in all the branches of the vine, and the whole is nourished by that vital sap. And every member of the mystical body receives from the same Spirit a proper and specific function: "He appointed some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11); again "then miracles, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, of governance, various kinds of tongues" (1 Cor 12:28), and then very many others, more common and ordinary, but all equally indispensable. What, then, of the greatest charism of all, that is, charity, the love of *agape*? Is anything excluded from it? Here is the gift and the ministry, I would say, of Mary within the Church. Besides, is it not true *per excellentiam* of her what John says of all: "We love (ἀγαπῶμεν) because he first loved us (πρῶτος ἡγάπησεν ἡμᾶς)." If Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus wished in the Church to be love, wisely aspiring to the greatest charism of all, how much more will this be true of Mary, the Woman who is a true Mother (cf. Jn 19:27). And will not Mary's *agape* be that of a true mother, according to that anthropological and constitutively human dimension which grace presupposes and perfects? Therefore she is Mother of Christ and, in the same way, of the Church, of its children, pastors and faithful (cf. Address of Saint Paul VI at the close of the third session of the Council, 21 November 1964) and of those in whom Christ must still be formed, and therefore mother of all human beings: not only because redemption was thus begun, she generating for us the Life by which we live, but because she thus continues to be so in the Spirit, in that continuous process which will continue until the return of the Lord.

It is dear to me here to recall Saint John Eudes: "Although the heart of Jesus is different from the heart of Mary and infinitely surpasses it in sublimity and holiness, God has so intimately united these two hearts that one can say in all truth that they are but one heart, because they have been animated by the same Spirit and filled with the same sentiments and affections" (from *The Admirable Heart of the Most Holy Mother of God*). And again: "The spiritual heart of Jesus is the heart of Mary by the most intimate union of spirit and will between them [...]. If it is written of the first Christians that they were one heart and one soul, all the more is this union most true between Jesus and Mary. [...] The heart of Jesus, that is, the Holy Spirit, is the heart of Mary. For if this Spirit is given by God to all Christians to be their spirit and their heart, how much more will it be given to the mother of all Christians? One can say in truth that the heart of the most holy Virgin is Jesus" (*Revelation*, 1, 35).

Thus Mary is not a duplicate of Jesus, does not diminish his function, is not the intercessor before the intercessor, as if we needed a good advocate before a severe judge: how many expressions would need to be seen in their right light, and an authentic and balanced catechesis should be able to help. Truly "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise among creatures to a manifold cooperation which is a sharing in this one source" (LG, 62). Matter is the principle of individuation of bodies, but the Spirit is their life-giving principle: bodies are different according to the flesh, but united in the one body of Christ. "I am in the Father and you in me and I in you" (Jn 14:19) is not only a metaphor: it is a reality, in the deepest sense of the term. Faith is our reason, the measure of our intellect, all the more luminous the more the senses of body and spirit fail. Natural reason and intellect are activated by it, not diminished or mortified: the resources of dogma lead where we could not arrive, but we arrive there only through reason, starting from experience and leading back to it. Every reasoning, in fact, starts from presuppositions that it cannot demonstrate, as a spider's web rests on anchor points that hold it up but are not part of it: faith is a supplement of meaning that activates reasoning, not silences or belittles it. There is, in fact, no abstract, Cartesian "I think", but an "I think" in relation to a Thou who precedes me, the infinite mystery of God.