

Novena to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart - 31 August to 8 September 2019

OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART: MOTHER-DISCIPLE

Day 6: Thursday, 05 September – in the 22nd wk in Ordinary Time - Healing

- 1 Col 1:9-14 – “He has taken us out of the power of darkness and created a place for us in the kingdom of the Son that he loves, and in him we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins.”
- Ps 97 – The Lord has made known his salvation
- Lk 5:1-11 – Put out into the deep...master, we have worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets. And when they had done this...they filled the two boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus saying “Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man...Do not be afraid...they left everything and followed him.

OLSH – GRATITUDE – LOVE- HOPE OF THE HOPELESS

We have now entered the second half of our 9-day pilgrimage to the Heart of Jesus, with Mary, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Day 6! With our reflections from the previous days as foundation, let us now talk about Mary more specifically under the title Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

Let me begin with a little story about Fr Jules Chevalier, the man who gave Mary this new title. When he was a young seminarian he had a personal encounter with the love of Jesus through the Sacred Heart Devotion and he was convinced that this devotion was the solution to the ills of the society of his time. At that young age, began to dream of forming a group of missionaries of the Sacred Heart when the time comes. The time came in 1854 when he found himself as an assistant priest in the parish of Issoudun, a little town in central France. He spoke about his dream with his companion and together they spoke with their parish priest who encouraged them to go to the Bishop. The Bishop, being a practical man, did not approve the work telling them that they need material resources to begin this “house of missionaries.” What the two young priests did was to make a Novena to Our Lady from November 30 to December 8, 1854. This was a special day because it was the day the Church was proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. In the Novena, our two priests promised Our Lady that if she helped them with this project, they will regard her as the foundress of their society and honour her in a special way. On the 9th day of the Novena, after the Mass, someone came to the Sacristy who told Father Chevalier that an anonymous donor was giving money for a project in Issoudun, preferably a house of missionaries! AHA! Answered prayer! Very grateful to Our Lady, they returned to their Bishop telling him that they now have money to build a house. The Bishop asked them how they plan to sustain the work. Not having a satisfactory plan, they again went home to their parish without an approval. So what did they do? They made a second Novena! It was already January 1855. At the end of the second novena, they had another donor and this one pledged a yearly donation to them. The two were convinced that their patroness in heaven is really supporting them. So they returned to the Bishop and the Bishop was impressed and said he will bring the matter to his council. The council was not as easily convinced so the two continued praying to Our Lady until at the end the Bishop approved the work. Jules named his society Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, set December 8, 1854 as its foundation day and named Mary as the foundress of the Society.

The hearts of Chevalier and his companion were filled with gratitude! It was to express this gratitude that Chevalier decided to honour Mary in a special way by giving her a new title - OLSH. This is the first important point that I would like us to remember when we speak of devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart – **GRATITUDE!** The title and the devotion express a very deep sense of gratitude to God and to Our Lady for the great things the Lord has done. As people who claim to have a devotion to our Lady of the Sacred Heart, I think this **gratitude** should be our mark. We are expected to be grateful people. People who do not claim things as rights that one deserves but rather as gifts that one receives. Because we are grateful, we are joyful! Every morning when we wake up, we give thanks and celebrate the gift of our lives and all that it brings with it. Attitude – Gratitude!

After the title came the image. When Fr Jules Chevalier was building his little basilica in Issoudun, he wanted the church to have some stained glass windows, one of which was to be Our Lady's window. These were his instructions – “represent the Immaculate Virgin normal size, hands and eyes directed downwards towards the child Jesus standing in front her. On his breast, the child will have his little heart surrounded by rays and with his finger he points it out to the faithful. His other hand points behind him to his mother.” The image shows the genius of Chevalier. You see for him, the focus is not and never Mary. The focus was, is and will always be Jesus, the Sacred Heart. In his design, the whole image of Mary is directed towards Jesus – her body, her arms, her eyes! Jesus stands at the center, looking at us, pointing to his heart as if saying, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* With his other hand, he points to his mother, as if saying, and by the way, if you need a companion in coming to me, you can ask her to accompany you, she will surely lead you to my Heart. This is the second point I want us to remember – the focus is Jesus! Always! The object of the devotion is not Mary herself, it is the Sacred Heart, the love of Jesus that binds Mary and ourselves to Him and to each other. You see for Fr Chevalier, there was only one devotion – devotion to the Sacred Heart. Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was a way for him to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart. The image we have in this church is the second image. Mary carries Jesus in her arms, but notice the gestures. Mary is looking at Jesus and pointing to Jesus' heart. Jesus, is the Sacred Heart and he is pointing to his heart with one hand and to his mother with the other, a different image, but the same meaning. So again, the focus is Jesus, the love of God made flesh!

Jules Chevalier considered Our Lady of the Sacred Heart as **the hope of the hopeless**. For him Mary is one blessed by the Heart of our loving God whose only wish is to bring us to her Son. With Mary, hope is always there. For Chevalier, when we are doing the work of God, obstacles are means. No such thing as hopeless. In today's Gospel, we see Peter and his companions feeling very tired and hopeless. “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing!” But Jesus tells them, put out into the deep. No such thing as hopeless! Lord, if you say so, Peter says, I will put out the nets...and their boats were filled to overflowing! Fr Jules Chevalier was told, no way, you have no money, how can you start a congregation. How many times did he ask for approval? But no, no such thing as hopeless so he persevered! At present, 165 years later, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart are still alive, on mission in more than 30 countries in the world.

Today especially, we came to this Eucharistic Celebration in need of and asking for healing - different kinds of healing, for ourselves or for others. Maybe like Peter and his friends, many of us feel tired, helpless and hopeless – we have worked hard all night and we caught

nothing! We have done all we could, we have gone to so many doctors already...our resources are now depleted and nothing has happened. But if you say so Lord, we will lower the nets. We believe you could do for us what we are not able to do for ourselves. We come to your Heart and ask for healing. We take the hands of your mother, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and allow her to lead us by the hand to you, the source of all life and all love! We claim for ourselves what Paul said to the Colossians - "He has taken us out of the power of darkness and created a place for us in the kingdom of the Son that he loves, and in him we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins." A little later, we will present ourselves for anointing. As we come to the Lord for anointing, we know we are taking our place in the Kingdom of the Son he loves. We beg for healing from our sins, we beg for healing from our illnesses, we beg for freedom from all that unnecessarily binds us.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, hope of the hopeless, prays for us and reminds us to focus our eyes on Jesus. In his love is our healing! And so we come to him with faith and grateful hearts! Amen.

Original Image of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart
Our Lady's Chapel
Basilica of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart
Issoudun, France

