

Patronal Feast of the Missionaries of Charity

Introduction

To tell you the truth, I always feel a little uneasy when I celebrate the patronal feast of the Missionaries of Charity. It's not that I'm uneasy with the Missionaries of Charity - I practically grew up with you! Nor is it the case that I'm uneasy with the Blessed Virgin Mary. I can't imagine nearly 40 years of priestly service without Mary's maternal love. So, why I am a little bit on edge this morning?

It's because I seem to remember that the actual title under which you invoke Mary as your patron is the Immaculate Heart of Mary but you celebrate your feast day on the feast of the Queenship of Mary. Only Blessed Mother Teresa could get away with something like that!

To solve my dilemma, I decided to combine both feast days in the fond hope that neither the Blessed Mother nor the Missionaries would be too upset with me!

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Let's begin with Mary's Immaculate Heart. In today's Gospel, the Angel Gabriel addresses Mary, "a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph". The Angel addresses Mary as we address her, every day: "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you!"

By a singular favor, God in his providence kept Mary's heart free from the stain of original sin and by the graces of the Incarnate Son of God she remained sinless throughout her life. A fourth century prayer sings of Mary: "Tota pulchra est, Maria!" "You are all beautiful, Mary and the original stain of sin is not in you! Your clothing is white as snow, and your face is like the sun! You are all beautiful, Mary!"

Reflecting on Mary's immaculate heart - a prayerful heart that was not only sinless but also filled with God's charity, the ancient Christian writers often said that Mary conceived the Word of God in her heart before she conceived him in her womb. Her whole being - body, mind, and spirit - was prepared by God's Providence to become a fitting tabernacle for His Son Jesus when he should take our flesh and enter

human history to redeem us. Because her immaculate heart was perfectly attuned to God's will, Mary said to the angel: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." And so, through her "a child is born to us, a son is given us...." We name him, "Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-forever, Prince of Peace!"

Mary's Discipleship

Mary, who conceived God's Son by the power of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to the Redeemer of Man became also the first disciple of the her Son. The author Louis Bouyer once wrote to the effect that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the "forecast" of the Kingdom of the Beatitudes. And Pope Benedict has taught us that the Beatitudes can be thought of as Christ's own self-portrait: Christ who is supremely poor, utterly meek, matchlessly pure of heart and body - Christ, who is our peace!

To reign with Christ means to participate in his life, to become like Christ, by keeping the Commandments in the spirit of the Beatitudes. This is how we become the friends of Christ, missionary disciples who are on intimate terms with the Teacher, Master, & Lord. Even before Christ preached the Sermon on the Mount, Mary lived the Beatitudes fully. She is the prototype of what it means to be a Christian. With an immaculate heart completely conformed to her Son's Sacred Heart, Mary, more than anyone other human being shared in Jesus' Passion and Death. And for that reason, she, more than anyone else, she shared in the victory of her Son's Resurrection. Thus does the Church celebrate her Assumption into heaven! Thus do we celebrate her coronation as Queen of Heaven and Earth!

The Missionaries of Charity

So, when we really think and pray about it, we begin to see that Bl. Mother Teresa got it right when she "melded" the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary with the Queenship of Mary. The two go hand-in-hand: because her heart was totally beautiful without the stain of sin, because she lived her whole life in conformity with Christ's utterly loving heart, she now reigns with Christ in the courts of heaven.

Bl. Mother Teresa was inspired to found the Missionaries of Charity as women who, like Mary, would dedicate the entirety of your lives to Christ, through vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and by your vow to serve the poorest of the poor.

While none of us is free from sin, Mother Teresa knew that a world-wide community of women who strive to live the Beatitudes in the spirit of Mary's Immaculate Heart would bear witness to the Reign of God in our midst by serving the poor and needy with prayerfulness and reverence. I came today to say how happy I am that you are in Baltimore, missionaries in the heart of a city that needs God's healing love.

So with that my unease gives way to joy as I pray with you on your patronal feast and beg of Mary's Immaculate Heart, now reigning in heaven, all the graces you need to live in this passing world with your heart set on the world that is to come! May God bless you and keep you always in His love!