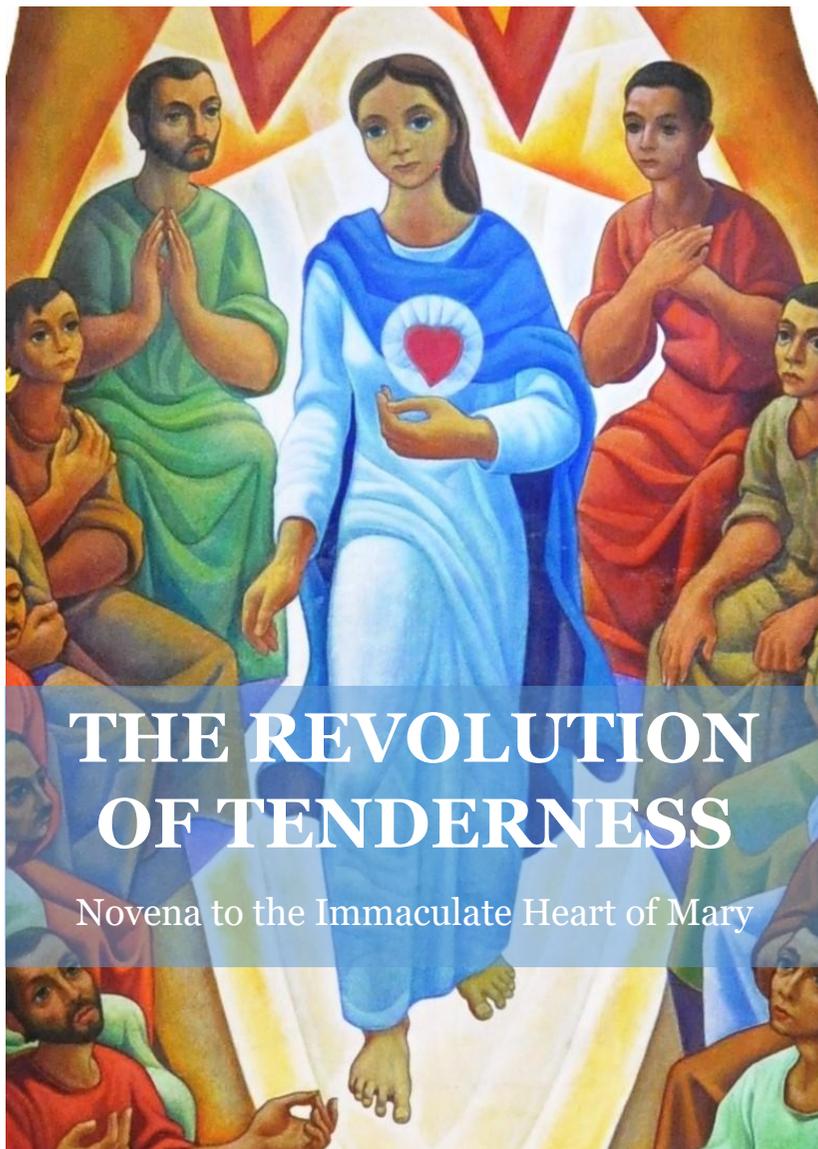


CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES



THE REVOLUTION OF TENDERNESS

Novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

© Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

General Prefecture of Spirituality

Rome, 2020

Introduction

In our Directory we read: *“As a traditional expression of our piety, the novena to the Heart of Mary and the triduum to the Holy Founder should be celebrated in common... These should be performed with simplicity and draw their inspiration from the Liturgy”* (no. 89).

In the framework of this *Claretian Year*, the General Prefecture of Spirituality offers to the Organisms a model of novena to the Heart of Mary that should be adapted to the needs and characteristics of each place.

The Cordimarian filiation is an essential feature of our charismatic identity. Pope John Paul II reminded us of this in his message to the General Chapter of 1985: *“You know perfectly well to what extent this awareness of Marian filiation is at the basis, not only of the apostolic activity of the Holy Founder, but also and specifically, as the foundation of your Institute. Throughout your history, this character of Marian filiation has always remained an important element of your spirituality and evangelizing action. Do not allow it to weaken”*.

The annual novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a concrete way of keeping alight the flame of our Cordimarian spirituality. The one now being offered for the year 2020 takes into account three recent events which affect our way of living our relationship with Mary:

- The **symposium held in Rome in February 2019** under the title *The Revolution of Tenderness. The Heart of Mary*, in which we participated as a Congregation and whose papers have just been published in the book of the same name: *La rivoluzione della tenerezza. Il Cuore di Maria*, Nerbini, Firenze 2020 (From now on it will be cited only as *Il Cuore di Maria*).
- The **150th anniversary of the death of our Founder** and the implementation of the *Claretian Year* spiritual itinerary in the whole Congregation, requested by the XXV General Chapter.
- The **Covid-19 pandemic** and its consequences in the individuals, communities and Organisms.

The title of the novena is directly inspired by the symposium on the Heart of Mary held last year in Rome. This, in turn, was taken from the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *Evangelii gaudium*. On several occasions Pope Francis refers to this “revolution” that our world needs:

- **No. 88:** *“The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.”*
- **No. 288:** *“There is a Marian “style” to the Church’s work of evangelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that*

humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves.”

- **No. 288:** *“This interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization. We implore her maternal intercession that the Church may become a home for many peoples, a mother for all peoples, and that the way may be opened to the birth of a new world.”*

As far as possible, it is recommended that we make a novena with the people of God, so that we can share our spirituality, our family feast, with the people with whom we already share life and mission.

Although in this booklet some texts, songs and prayers are suggested, in each place the best known and significant ones should be chosen according to the orientation of each day. It is good that they resonate with the needs and searches of the local communities. It can also be useful to accompany the prayer with some symbols that help to perceive with more depth and beauty the content of each day and that facilitate the participation of all.

The silence that follows the proclamation of the Word of God should be observed so that we can “keep it in our hearts” and put it into practice.

THE ORDER OF EACH DAY

Note: The general outline of each of the nine days of the novena is proposed below. The *Opening Prayer* is specific to each day. The *Concluding Prayer* is the same for every day. According to the characteristics of each community and the availability of time, this outline can be enriched with some Claretian references taken from the *Spiritual Directory* (nos. 147-148).

1. Introduction

- Presentation of the theme of the day.
- Song.
- Liturgical greeting.
- Opening Prayer.

2. We listen to the Word of God

- Reading of a biblical passage.
- Meditative silence.

3. We meditate with Mary

- Brief reflection inspired by the theme of the day.
- Some complementary text taken from the addresses of Pope Francis during the months of the pandemic or from the book of the Congress on the Heart of Mary (translated from Italian).

4. We pray together

- Invocations of various kinds.
- Concluding Prayer (p. 40).
- Blessing.
- Final song.

First day

A WORLD WITHOUT A HEART

Introduction

- We begin the novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary this year 2020 by looking at our world. The chronic problems that threaten the future of humanity (climate change, inequalities, wars, hunger, terrorism, etc.) have been joined in recent months by the pandemic caused by the *Covid-19* with its aftermath of death, poverty and uncertainty. But perhaps the most serious illness is "hardness of heart", the inability to open ourselves to God and to feel the needs of human beings as our own. Therefore, we listen attentively to the call of the psalmist: "*Would that you would listen to the voice of the Lord today, do not harden your hearts!*" (Ps 94). The novena is an opportunity for listening and openness, guided by our Mother Mary.
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, who so loved the world that you gave it your Son Jesus Christ so that we might all have life in Him, help us to overcome hardness of heart so that, listening to your voice and in imitation of the Virgin Mary, we might be missionaries of tenderness. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Psalm 81:8-16

Hear me, my people, and I will warn you— if you would only listen to me, Israel! You shall have no foreign god among you; you shall not worship any god other than me. I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt.

Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. “But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So, I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices. “If my people would only listen to me, if Israel would only follow my ways, how quickly I would subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him, and their punishment would last forever. But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

We meditate with Mary

- Sometimes in social life we harden our hearts to defend ourselves from others. In spiritual life, something similar happens to us. We close ourselves up in our little world of fears, securities and routines so that God does not disturb our life. We fear that His voice may alter our existence. We prefer the “lentil dish” of our quiet and comfortable lifestyle to the dignity and freedom that are born of our condition as children of God.
- We have become so accustomed to living as *slaves* that we no longer even long for the freedom of the *son*. *Sclerocardia* (hardness of heart) can make our personal, community and social life a cold, heartless place. We see others as competitors in the race of life, not as brothers and sisters. And, almost without realizing it, we become insensitive to the only experience that humanizes us and makes us happy: love.
- We have built defensive shells so impenetrable that we hear nothing but the echo of our own dissatisfaction. How can we “hear the voice of God” if we hardly hear the voice of those around us and not even the voice of our conscience? Without a tender and trusting heart, we cannot hear the God of our people.
- Mary has known how to listen to the voice of God and put it into practice. Therefore, hers is not a heart of stone, but a heart of flesh prepared to love. We, as sons of her Heart, are called to follow the same path.

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (+2017) has characterized our current Western world on several occasions as a *liquid world*: a human society that is increasingly globalized in terms of economy and communication, strongly interconnected due to the multiple relationships between peoples and cultures, but which, paradoxically and contradictorily, suffers from the inability to build continuous and supportive links; anxiety, fear and anguish are globalized, but so is hope. In this *fluid society*, multimedia and increasingly *networked*, everything is consumed with voracity and, once used, everything is disconnected, dismantled (so much so that we speak of anorexia and social bulimia): the *homo oeconomicus*, true *homo consumens*, has unlearned to love, to give, to care for the other; it has as an axiom of life, paraphrasing a well-known Cartesian expression, *I consume, therefore I exist!* For this reason, Bauman sees as a counterweight to *homo consumens* what he calls *homo sacer*, that is, the poor man who is expelled from the globalized society and later sacrificed, no longer being a subject to help, but a trash to be thrown away.

(S. M. Perrella, *Il Cuore di Maria*, 12-13)

We pray together

- For the Church, which has received the mission of being a visible sign of God's tenderness, so that she will always listen to the voice of the Father who guides her, let us pray:

Through Mary's intercession, hear us, Father.

- For those who suffer most from the consequences of a “world without a heart”, so that they may experience God's love through people with a new heart, let us pray:

- For those most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and for all those who are dedicating themselves to combat it on the different fronts (health, social, scientific, economic, spiritual, etc.), let us pray:
- For those who have closed their hearts to God's voice and remain confined in the narrow world of their interests, let us pray:
- For the missionaries who have given their lives to the proclamation of God's mercy in every corner of the world, let us pray:



Second Day

A WOMAN WITH A HEART

Introduction

- The General Chapter of 1997 reminded us that “*our prophetic lifestyle receives a distinctive imprint from the Immaculate Heart of Mary, mother of the Congregation. She teaches us that without heart, without tenderness, without love, there is no credible prophecy*” (IMP, 20). Today we want to contemplate our Mother as the woman of the heart, as the one who always went “where the heart led her”; that is, to God and to others. Living with heart is the only possible alternative to a world where competitiveness and exclusion have become a way of life.
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, who has placed in our hearts more joy than if it abounded in wheat and wine, grant us the grace to be, like our Mother, people with heart, capable of reflecting with our missionary life the love that You have for all your sons and daughters. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 2:16-20

So, they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds

returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

We meditate with Mary

- In our congregational history, the title of Heart of Mary applied to the Virgin has been strongly accentuated and, consequently, our Cordimarian sonship. At times it has even been said that this was the aspect that specifically defined our vocation in the Church. This explains why there have been many Claretians dedicated to spreading this devotion and deepening its content.
- Before we were a canonically recognized religious institute, the bond that linked the first missionaries was an act of dedication to God and to the Heart of Mary: *“I give myself and consecrate myself to the special service of God, of Jesus Christ and of Mary Most Holy”*.
- After the Second Vatican Council and the first General Chapters of the period of renewal (1967 and 1973), the understanding of our Cordimarian sonship was enriched by a better biblical and charismatic foundation. Fr. Antonio Leghisa's circular letter on *“The Heart of Mary and the Congregation at the present time”* (1978) represented a point of arrival of this new understanding and a starting point for further developments. Special mention should be made of the survey made of all the members of the Congregation after the 1985 General Chapter and the subsequent study carried out by Fr. José María Hernández in the book *Ex abundantia cordis. A Study of the Cordimarian Spirituality of the Claretian Missionaries*, Rome-Manila 1991.
- Our Constitutions no longer speak of the Heart of Mary in physiological terms. They adopt a spiritual and symbolic perspective. Besides the six numbers in which the (Immaculate) Heart of Mary is expressly alluded to, the Constitutions make use of other linguistic turns to express various aspects contained in the title of Heart of Mary.

- Thus, for example, it is proposed that we embrace chastity “as a gift which enables us to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the concerns of the Father” (no. 20); the Blessed Virgin is presented as the one “who devoted herself totally, as the Lord’s servant, to the Son and to his work” (no. 28); we are asked to venerate her as “Mother of God, who is associated with all her heart in the saving work of her Son” (no. 36). This is a new way of speaking about the Heart of Mary, highlighting the aspects contained in the heart symbol: interiority, total dedication, depth, cordiality, tenderness, etc.

The *Heart of Mary* is a *formal* reason: Mary's *charity* as the *form* of all her virtues, her supernatural love of God and human beings, the undivided soul with which she loved God and her brothers and sisters and devoted herself to the work of the Son. Joaquin Maria Alonso specifies: “The Heart of Mary is not the love of Mary as a noun, but her person as qualified by love; or also: the heart of Mary is neither Mary nor her love; it is Mary as lover or her love as personal love of Mary.” Augusto Andres Ortega offers this formulation: the Heart of Mary is the totality of Marian realities (her natural being, her divine maternity, her co-responsible action, etc.), but in the measure in which they are lived consciously, subjectively, personally and freely, made finally her own and in the measure in which, starting from this possession and this self-possession and free self-determination, she gives them and gives herself, by her will, to God and to men. Charity itself consists in such self-giving.

Said in scholastic language: *Immaculate Heart* means the principle of all the psychic, spiritual and supernatural life of Our Lady: the *quod* principle (the person of Mary), the remote *qua* principle (her soul), the near *qua* principle (her intellect, memory and will) and the *formal* principle that informs the soul and the powers (grace and love). Said in mystical language: *Immaculate Heart* means the soul of Mary's soul, the life of Mary's life. In conclusion, the Heart of Mary is the theological life of Mary and the principle that informs it, charity, which animates all the theological and moral dynamics of Christian life. The physical heart is presented as a symbol of this reality.

(P. LARGO, *Il Cuore di Maria*, 118)

We pray together

- You put your *heart* where we put only curiosity, interest or desire,

Help us, Mother, to have a missionary heart.

- You put your *heart* to listen deeply to the word that God addresses to you where we put only distraction or superficiality,
- You put your *heart* into perceiving human needs where we limit ourselves to analysing reality and drawing conclusions,
- You put your *heart* when you stand by the cross of those who suffer while we flee or hide,
- You put your *heart* into attending to the pleas of those who implore you in their needs while we tend to look the other way,
- You put your *heart* into it when you gather the Church to wait for the impetuous wind of Jesus' Spirit while we create currents and divisions,
- You are the *heart* that pumps love into this body that is the community of the Church while we are limited to offering ideas and programs,
- You put your *heart* and closeness, also in times of social distancing and fear of the other,
- You put your *heart* into helping the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic when we just put in numbers and speculation,
- You have called us to be sons of your Immaculate Heart and you accompany us always, even when we stray from the path.

Third Day

THE VIRGIN OF THE WHY

Introduction

- Jesus' questions awaken, provoke and encourage us on the path of discipleship, from *What are you looking for?* or *Why are you crying?* to *Do you also want to leave?* Mary, who is the woman of the answer that changed the world (her young *yes* to God's will), is also the woman of questions. That is why she can take care of our doubts and concerns. She is the mother of the many whys that cross our missionary life. On this third day of the novena we meditate on the motivations that impel us today to embrace the lifestyle of Jesus and his Mother.
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, you always ask us if we want to love you with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength, and you listen to our questions on the path of life. Help us to express with sincerity our desires and concerns, and to always welcome with an open heart, like Mary's, the signs of your will. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 1:28-35

And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your

womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

We meditate with Mary

- There is a *Marian* way of facing life that is indispensable today. We often know *what* we want to do with our existence. We look for the *hows*, *whens* and *wheres*, but we have trouble finding the *whys*. Why are we missionaries? Why do we work? Why do we get up every morning? Why do we keep dreaming of achieving some goals? There are immediate motivations (doing one's duty, helping others, pursuing a hobby, succeeding, etc.), but often they are not enough to justify giving one's life.
- Why believe when many live an apparently normal life without the light of faith? Why love instead of hate? And, above all, why suffer when we could avoid suffering? It is true that there are many attempts to find answers to these questions. Philosophy and science have been doing this for many centuries. Today, psychology strives to provide us with *tools* to manage our conflicts and anxieties, but everything stays about halfway there.
- Mary teaches us two indispensable keys to face the profound whys of life without having to have everything clear: *to keep everything in the heart* and *to remain standing by the cross*. The first is a Marian attitude underlined by Luke's Gospel. The second comes from the Gospel of John. To keep everything (the things of God) in the heart means to ruminate with serenity and patience on what we are living to allow God to be God in our life, to find its meaning

without the need to profane its mystery. The fast pace of modern life does not make it easy to “keep all things in the heart.” One experience is superimposed on another; today's news makes yesterday's news old; the new stands as a definitive category.

- To remain close to the cross means to sustain with serenity the battle of pain, knowing that it does not constitute the end of existence, trusting that God is always a God of life and not of death. It is not easy to “stand by the cross” of the suffering when everything pushes us to seek painless answers, forgetting that sometimes accepted suffering is the only door that leads to wisdom and maturity.
- The Covid-19 pandemic we are experiencing is an excellent opportunity to tackle together with Mary the many whys for which science cannot find a precise answer. Like her, we learn to take shelter under the shadow of God's Spirit.

To ask oneself about the heart of the mission is not to question the *what* or the *how*, but the *why*. The *what people* do what they are asked to do and nothing more. The *how people* are realistic; they have a clear sense of practical things; they focus their attention on the things that most people can see and desire. The *why people*, on the other hand, are the visionaries, those people who focus their attention on realities that nobody sees: they are charismatically hypersensitive people.

Discover the heart of the mission and what unites us to the *why people*. To discover in this heart the Heart of Mary, leads us to participate in the “revolution of tenderness” and to fight for a great paradigmatic change in favour of humanity.

By asking ourselves why, we touch the heart: this secret dimension from which everything is born; and this dimension - in reference to mission - is not what we do for God, but what our God works through us and with us in favour of His humanity and His creation.

(J.C.R. García, *Il Cuore di Maria*, 208)

We pray together

- Why does God look at the humble of heart and discard the proud?

Show us the answer, Mary.

- Why do we sometimes seek the water of life in polluted springs?
- Why do we find it so difficult to meet God in the silence of prayer and in the disfigured faces of those who suffer?
- Why do we do many things and often produce little fruit?
- Why can't we do anything when we are not united to the vine that is Jesus?
- Why is it so difficult to maintain joy when we experience the trials of life?
- Why has the loneliness experienced in the months of confinement put us on the ropes?
- Why can an invisible virus alter our plans?
- Why are there people who do not believe in God and yet are able to give themselves to others?
- Why are there people who call themselves believers and live locked up in the circle of their pleasures and interests?
- Why do we sometimes behave “as if God did not exist”, even though we talk a lot about him?
- Why do we walk around so distracted by many things and not dedicate ourselves completely to God?
- Why do we fear death if we think it is a return to the Father's house?

Fourth Day

IN THE FURNACE OF HER HEART

Introduction

- At the beginning of the popular missions, our Founder used to recite a prayer in which he recognized that he had been formed in the furnace of Mary's mercy and love. Today, in computer age, we do not speak of forges, nor of anvils, hammers or fire. And yet, the symbol used by Claret still has great power. We cannot become a sharp missionary arrow (cf. Is 49:2) without a long process of transformation into the fire of God's love, the anvil of conformity with Christ and the release of the Spirit. The Heart of Mary is the place where we experience this process which prepares us to be missionaries.
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, no transformation is possible in us without the fire of your love. You, through your Spirit, warm what is cold, bend what is rigid, illuminate what is dark, harden what is soft, and cauterize what is wounded. Help us to be forged as missionaries in the furnace of Mary's Heart, a faithful reflection of your transforming fire, until we acquire the form of your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Sirach 38:28

So, with the smith standing near his anvil, forging crude iron. The heat from the fire sears his flesh, yet he toils away in the furnace heat. The clang of the hammer deafens his ears, His eyes are fixed on the tool he is shaping. His care

is to finish his work, and he keeps watch till he perfects it in detail.

We meditate with Mary

- We read in the *General Plan of Formation*: “Like our Founder, we are aware that our vocation as followers is also forged in the forge of the Heart of Mary. All of us can address her with the same words used by Claret: *You well know that I am your son and minister, formed by you in the forge of your mercy and love. I am like an arrow placed in your powerful hand.* Thus, we feel strengthened to proclaim the gospel and to confront the evil that affects the people and the structures in which they live. The Cordimarian dimension is essential in our missionary vocation” (no. 23).
- In fact, in the spirituality of St. Anthony Mary Claret, Mary is:
 - The *Protector* when dangers threaten the missionary and prevents him making a clear decision to follow God in the many predicaments of life: “*You, dear Mother, how can I thank you for having saved me from death by pulling me out of the sea?*” (Quid Prodest).
 - The *Mother* who in her Heart reflects and transmits the fire of love of the Father: “*Oh, Heart of Mary, a forge and an instrument of love, inflame me with the love of God and my neighbour*” (Patris Mei).
 - The *Formatrix* who forges, with her maternal activity, the iron bar which is the disciple until he takes on the shape of her Son Jesus: “*You formed me in the forge of your mercy and love*” (Caritas Christi).
 - The *Directress* who sends the missionary, like a sharpened arrow, to preach the gospel: “*I’m like an arrow put into your mighty hand*” (Spiritus Domini).

Now I would like to explain the meaning, now clear, of the Greek verb *symbollo* with a metaphor, that of the furnace. The idea is not mine, but of Inocencio Gargano, a well-known scholar, very committed also to the praying reading of the Bible. In 1992 he wrote a beautiful book of initiation to *lectio divina*. To illustrate the second step of *lectio*, which is *meditatio*, or deepening of meaning, as he calls it, he presents Mary's attitude as an example of meditation. And it is at this point that he imagines Mary's Heart "as a kind of furnace, into which these words are thrown, so that they amalgamate, almost merge, and therefore somehow clarify each other." In the Heart of Mary, then, all the words heard, the events and experiences lived, the sorrows experienced, the joys enjoyed, the doubts and the fears silenced... are confronted, they are filed away to the point of becoming luminous, transparent.

N. CALDUCH, *Il Cuore di Maria*, 109.

We pray together

- When we perceive the *gentle breeze* of God blowing on our face,

Heart of Mary, furnace of love, pray for us.

- When, amid life's trials, we feel a mysterious presence that sustains us,
- When we discover signs of the Spirit's action even in the strangest realities,
- When the effects of evil make us suffer and discourage us,
- When we share the mission with other people seduced by Jesus and his Gospel.

Fifth Day

SUSTAINING LIFE WITH HEART

Introduction

- The declaration of the 2003 General Chapter states: *“Mary is the Mother of Life. Elizabeth called her blessed because of the fruit of her womb and because of her faith. As people of God we acclaim her as “our life, our sweetness and our hope” (Salve Regina). We also beg her to pray for us “now and at the hour of our death” (Ave Maria). We give ourselves to her in our Profession (cf CC 159). Through her we receive life in abundance. She is the Woman of the Apocalypse who gives birth amidst the dragon’s threats and who is reflected in the Church, also a mother in the midst of threats to life (cf Ap 12:1-2). The Magnificat proclaims her commitment to a world where life is held sovereign (cf Lk 1:46-55). The definition of a Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary shows us how we can be like her, proclaim life and fight against all that threatens it (cf CC 9).” (TMHL 10).*
- The Covid-19 pandemic has made us experience very closely the beauty and fragility of human life. The elderly and the poor have been the groups most affected. With Mary, Mother of Life, we learn to be grateful for the gift of life and to fight for its defence in all its forms and stages.
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, friend of life, without You nothing would exist. We thank You for having called us into existence and for all the people who care for life on planet Earth. Grant that, guided by the Virgin Mary, Mother of Life, we may be missionaries who help the men and women of our time and of our peoples to live with dignity the life in abundance that your Son Jesus came to bring us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Revelation 12:13-18

When the dragon saw that it had been thrown down to the earth, it pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the desert, where, far from the serpent, she was taken care of for a year, two years, and a half-year. The serpent, however, spewed a torrent of water out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with the current. But the earth helped the woman and opened its mouth and swallowed the flood that the dragon spewed out of its mouth. Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus. It took its position on the sand of the sea.

We meditate with Mary

- Why does Mary gather so many people around her? Because she is always where there is life. Because she is the one who, at the crossroads that we are living today, points out clearly who is and where Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, lives. But that is not all. She points out and engenders Jesus. Mary is, as we often sing, “star and path”, but also, and above all, “mother of the believers”.
- Little children need a mother, someone who introduces them to life step by step. The mother is for them a source, a security, a refuge, a stimulus, a permanent reference. Having his or her mother, the child has everything. Teenagers and young people often mark distances. They need to “escape” from their mother in order to start life differently, to learn to be autonomous. Adults, when they are free enough to release the innocence within them

without fear of being branded as childish, discover again what a mother means.

- Many Christians believe that Mary has been the mother of childhood, but they do not know how to fit her into adulthood. They talk about challenges and choices, they present faith as a way of situating oneself in the world, they provide platforms for dialogue, etc. Those who speak in this way do not always perceive that, by distancing themselves from the personal relationships that make faith a “life experience”, they end up turning it into pure ideology. And ideologies have no mother and do not generate any truly human life.
- Mary never distances us from real life because she has discovered the will of God in the fabric of daily life, she has engendered the author of life and she continues to sustain life in all its forms and stages.

From the first moment of conception, Mary supported the life of her Son. She will be his Teacher until Jesus reaches adulthood and begins the self-revelation of himself to the world; from the preaching of Jesus and the miracle of Cana in Galilee, the Mother's spring changes and she no longer stands before Jesus, as one who teaches, but as one who learns, as a follower, as a true disciple. During her Son's ministry, she is always at his side, but not in a possessive way, as a lover, but in an oblation way, with the greatest detachment. She teaches us not to be attached to anything, to always detach ourselves; to accompany, but not to direct, to help, but not to subjugate anyone, not to invade spaces, not to annul others, to renounce being first and not to assume anything - rank, title, hierarchy, knowledge, experience - but to pay attention to the other with a respectful love, with kindness, delicacy and tenderness. In this sense, by cultivating cordial intelligence (that which resides in the heart), the Church is evangelizing.

O. MARADIAGA, *Il Cuore di Maria*, 227.

We pray together

United to Mary, we wish to extend her Magnificat because the Mighty One has done great works (cf. *MS 36*):

- The Spirit of Claret is alive and every day more inspiring.
- The Word of God occupies a place ever more central to our mission and spirituality.
- He has facilitated the growth of the Congregation and has enriched it with missionaries from many places.

Magnificat anima mea Dominum (sung).

- He sustains our fraternity and helps us to leave behind jealousies and prejudices and to strengthen our communion within the Congregation.
- He has strengthened our awareness of ecclesial communion and has granted us a better understanding of the gift of Mission.
- He has made us capable of responding to the needs of many people, especially the poor, and the new faces of poverty.

Magnificat anima mea Dominum (sung).

- He has motivated us with the testimony of our martyrs and the ecclesial recognition of their testimony.
- He graces us with the dedication of many Claretians (missionaries in formation, brothers, deacons and presbyters).
- He has facilitated the increase of collaboration and the sharing of goods and resources among us.

Sixth Day

MOTHER OF THE PURE OF HEART

Introduction

- In the Fundamental Constitution we read: *“We, the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have also received a calling like that of the Apostles and have been granted the gift to follow Christ in a communion of life and to go out into the whole world to proclaim the good news to every creature. Therefore, the following of Christ as set forth in the gospel is our supreme rule. And so we listen to the Lord’s words, eager to learn from him as he calls his disciples to be perfect as their Father is perfect, as he gives them the new commandment of fraternal love, as he urges them to pray, as he gives them rules for apostolic life and as he proclaims that the poor in spirit, the sorrowing, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the single-hearted, the peacemakers, those who suffer persecution for the cause of right and endure slander for his sake, are all sharers in his own blessedness. We answer this divine call by adopting Jesus’ way of life, a way which the Virgin Mary, too, embraced in faith.”* (CC 4-5).
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, Jesus has promised us that the pure of heart will be able to see your face. Give us the simplicity and humility of Mary so that, amid the vicissitudes of life, we may recognize the signs of Your loving presence and may accompany other people on their pilgrimage towards You. We ask this through Jesus Christ, Your Son, who has shown us through the Beatitudes the way that leads to You. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Matthew 5:1-12

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus, they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

We meditate with Mary

- The idea of happiness spread in the environment - at least before the pandemic - was that of instantaneous well-being based on dizzying experiences. It seems that if we do not follow the "trends" of those who have planned our future, we cannot be happy. Messages such as "*The places you can't miss*", "*The restaurants you must visit*", "*Six tips to success*", etc. abound. All this creates great anxiety in many people. It seems that one cannot be happy if one does not conform to these trend-setting standards.
- What a difference from Jesus' proposal of happiness! He does not speak of dizzying or seductive experiences. He speaks of life

situations in which we suffer some problem or try for something. In the beatitudes he speaks of the poor, those who weep, the merciful, the pure of heart, those who work for peace and justice... All these people experience that, amid life's setbacks, God is on their side. When this happens, one experiences great inner peace, even amid conflicting or harsh situations.

- The happiness Jesus speaks of is not *lawn happiness* (which today looks green and in a few days can dry up if not watered from outside), but *tree happiness* (which remains lush always because it has deep roots that allow it to feed itself, even in times of drought). Putting down roots, cultivating from childhood some essential values is the only way to survive the “tyranny of happiness.”
- In a corrupt and polluted world, Mary, full of grace, is a presence that decontaminates and purifies. Just as toxic people intoxicate those who approach them, grace-filled people create a circle of light and goodness around them. The grace-filled one par excellence is Mary of Nazareth. Whoever approaches blessed Mary, the woman with a pure heart, ends up being *infected* by her joy of God, by her unwavering faith and by her generous self-giving.

We pray together

- Blessed are those who, like Mary, have a pure heart because they become a mirror of God.
- Blessed are those who, like Mary, set out to share their faith because they become messengers of joy.
- Blessed are those who, like Mary, let themselves be transformed by the grace of God because they do not fear the destructive power of sin.

(After each beatitude, the Hail Mary is prayed).

Seventh Day

A WORLD WITH A NEW HEART

Introduction

- Last March 27, from an empty St. Peter's Square, under a fine rain, Pope Francis described the situation of the world as follows: *“For weeks now it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice in people’s gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other.”* (Pope Francis, *Extraordinary Moment of Prayer in time of Pandemic*, March 27). Now, almost three months later, we wonder what the world will be like after the pandemic. With Mary, we dream of a world with a new heart. We ask God that the hardness of hearts be transformed into compassion and availability.
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, You do not disregard the world You have created. You see the suffering of many people affected by the Covid-19 and its innumerable consequences on health, the economy and social coexistence. Send us your Spirit so that, alerted by the pandemic, we may be able to wake up and build a different world based on love, as Jesus, your Son, has shown us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Ezekiel 36:24-28

For I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and bring you back to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

We meditate with Mary

- To contemplate Mary as the woman “full of grace”, as the dawn that prepares the dawn of the Sun, has a profound meaning in our time. Many baptized people have the impression of living their faith as a permanent night in which hardly anything is seen. This metaphor - the night - also applies to cultures that live “as if God did not exist”. Pope Francis has applied it to the coronavirus pandemic.
- In that context, the story of those who have rediscovered the deep meaning of faith is often associated with Mary. In some cases, it has coincided with a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine; in others, with the memory of childhood experiences linked to the mother of Jesus.
- In the discovery of faith, in the preparation for the encounter with the light of Jesus, Mary is “the dawn that prepares the dawn”, the new world of the encounter with God. She is like the master who introduces us to the mystery of her Son and whispers in our ear: “*Do whatever he tells you*”. She is the feminine presence that knows how to accompany our searches and our stumbling blocks,

our crises and anxieties. She does not impose herself like the midday sun, but she insinuates herself like the morning dawn. It does not become a protagonist, but prepares the advent of the true Sun.

- In the Heart of Mary, we find the model of the world willed by God. In it, the “revolution of tenderness” can knock down the powerful from their thrones and exalt the humble, to put hearts where we human beings put ambition and desire for power.

We pray together

Note: Today this long prayer of Pope Francis replaces the concluding prayer of every day.

“We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God”.

In the present tragic situation, when the whole world is prey to suffering and anxiety, we fly to you, Mother of God and our Mother, and seek refuge under your protection.

Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment.

Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana, so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust.

Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health.

Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern and fidelity to the Gospel, are trying to help and support everyone.

Blessed Virgin, illumine the minds of men and women engaged in scientific research, that they may find effective solutions to overcome this virus.

Support national leaders, that with wisdom, solicitude and generosity they may come to the aid of those lacking the basic necessities of life and may devise social and economic solutions inspired by farsightedness and solidarity.

Mary Most Holy, stir our consciences, so that the enormous funds invested in developing and stockpiling arms will instead be spent on promoting effective research on how to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

Beloved Mother, help us realize that we are all members of one great family and to recognize the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer.

Mary, Consolation of the afflicted, embrace all your children in distress and pray that God will stretch out his all-powerful hand and free us from this terrible pandemic, so that life can serenely resume its normal course.

To you, who shine on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope, do we entrust ourselves, O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary. Amen.

Eighth Day

MIRROR OF THE HEART OF JESUS

Introduction

- The present liturgy places in consecutive days the solemnity of the Heart of Jesus and the memory (for us solemnity) of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It is a way of showing the intrinsic relationship between the two. We, in the framework of the novena to the Heart of Mary, celebrate today with the whole Church the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. St. John Eudes wrote that *“this feast is a sea of grace and holiness because it is the feast of the most holy Heart of Jesus, an immense ocean of countless graces. This is, in a way, the feast of feasts, because it is the feast of the lovable Heart of Jesus”*. It is the feast of God's love manifested in his Son, made flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary.
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, you have willed to manifest your love for the world in the giving of your Son, made flesh of our flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. As we celebrate this unbounded love today, we ask you that those of us who have received the gift of imitating and following Jesus in the style of the Virgin Mary, may be men on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever we go and set the whole world ablaze with the fire of your divine love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus said in reply, "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have

revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him. "Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

We meditate with Mary

- The liturgy proposes to us today the celebration of the solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In fact, the whole month of June is dedicated to this devotion of medieval origin which gained strength with Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque and was widely spread throughout the world. Years ago, it was common to find on the doors of many homes an effigy of the Heart of Jesus with this inscription: "*Sacred Heart of Jesus, in You I trust*". He was like the host who welcomed us into his home. Families, institutions, cities and entire countries were consecrated to the Heart of Jesus throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.
- With the passing of time, devotion began to lose strength, perhaps because the biblical and liturgical renewal of spirituality pushed us to nourish ourselves more on the Word of God, in which the love of Christ is the key. It was not, therefore, necessary to compensate with an added devotion what the Word of God itself clearly announces to us. Each person, each culture, each people expresses in a different way the same experience: that God has loved us "to the end" in the person of his son Jesus. And that on this love human life can be founded.
- The symbol of the heart is universal. Advertising has made great use of it. It is common to see logos referring to cities that use the symbol of the heart to express love: from the famous "*I [love] New York*" to references to any other corner of the planet. The symbol

has also reached the person of Jesus. It is the modern version of the old picture of the Heart of Jesus with flames and thorns. In any case, it is intended to express the same thing: a love that reaches us and in turn ignites in us a response of love. If it were not for the fact that advertising has trivialized this symbol to the point of boredom, it would provoke in us a feeling of joy and trust. We have so distorted the image of God with our fears and anxieties that to celebrate the Heart of Jesus is the most surprising and liberating thing: that God has loved us so much that he has sent us his own Son as an expression of that love.

- There are several words of Jesus that resound strongly in a day like today: *“Where your treasure is, there your heart is”* (Mt 6:21). Or also: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”* (Mt 11:28). We are God's treasure; therefore, his heart is always with us. However, God is not always our treasure; therefore, our heart does not always vibrate with him. There are other gods which attract our interest, and which consume our energies until we are exhausted. Perhaps therefore Jesus invites us to come to him, in the certainty that he will ease our tiredness, the weight of an existence that accumulates worries and does not know what to do with them.
- This invitation expresses the dynamic of the heart. We are like veins that carry deoxygenated blood (frustrations, fears, weaknesses, sins) to Jesus' heart so that it can purify us and transform us into arteries that spread the oxygen of his Gospel throughout the body of the Church. Renewed by him, by the strength of his heart, we are transformed into evangelizing disciples.
- This dynamic of love of the Heart of her Son is reflected in the Heart of Mary. St. John Eudes said that *“the Heart of Jesus is the beginning of the Heart of Mary, as the Creator is the beginning of his creature; and the Heart of Mary is the origin of the Heart of Jesus, as the mother is the origin of the heart of her son”*.
- Our Founder too, whose death we are celebrating this year on the 150th anniversary, lived a harmonious synthesis between the two loves. He summarizes it at the beginning of his Autobiography: *“Mary Most Holy is my Mother, my Godmother, my Teacher, my Director and my everything after Jesus”* (Aut 5).

The month of June is dedicated in a special way to the Heart of Christ, a devotion that unites the great spiritual teachers and the simple among the people of God. Indeed, the human and divine Heart of Jesus is the wellspring where we can always draw upon God's mercy, forgiveness and tenderness. We can do so by focusing on a passage from the Gospel, feeling that at the centre of every gesture, of every word of Jesus, at the centre there is love, the love of the Father who sent His Son, the love of the Holy Spirit that is within us. And we can do this by adoring the Eucharist, where this love is present in the Sacrament. Then our heart too, little by little, will become more patient, more generous, more merciful, in imitation of the Heart of Jesus. There is an ancient prayer - I learned it from my grandmother - which said: "Jesus, make my heart resemble yours". It is a beautiful prayer. "Make my heart similar to yours". A beautiful prayer, short, to pray during this month. Shall we say it together now? "Jesus, may my heart resemble yours". Once more: "Jesus, may my heart resemble yours".

(Papa Francisco, *Angelus* Sunday, June 7, 2020)

We pray together

- When we live in times of pandemic, marked by pain and uncertainty,

Sacred Heart of Jesus, we trust in You.

- When the storms of scandal and division are raging in the boat of the Church,
- When we only see the clouds of a threatening future and feel distressed,
- When we feel powerless and lose enthusiasm for the mission,
- When we find it hard to love and we allow ourselves to be seduced by our interests and whims.

Nineth Day

KEEPING ALL THESE THINGS IN THE HEART

Introduction

- We end the novena to the Heart of Mary by preparing ourselves to keep “all these things” lived during these days in our hearts, so that, through our testimony of life, the “revolution of tenderness” symbolized in her Immaculate Heart may make its way into our world.
- **Song.**
- **Opening Prayer:** Merciful God, we thank You for giving us Mary as our Mother, Teacher and Foundress. May she help us not to become disoriented in this complex world. May she stimulate us to savour your Word without the haste of those who always have something more urgent to do. May she encourage us to be creative by taking out of our ark – like the father of the family in Jesus' parable – “the old and the new”. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 2:48-52

When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced (in) wisdom and age and favour before God and man.

We meditate with Mary

- On this last day of the novena, we contemplate Mary as the woman who makes her heart into an ark in which she holds God's treasures. Luke refers to this fact twice: *“Mary kept all these memories and pondered them in her heart”* (2:19); *“He went down with them to Nazareth and lived under their protection. His mother kept all these memories in her heart”* (2:51).
- It is not easy to find people who know how to listen and keep. It is as if each one of us goes with our speech prepared and we do not feel like listening to what the other people have to say to us. Not much can be expected from a person who is in a hurry, a slave to the last stimuli that come to him, incapable of treasuring the good that he is discovering. Communication technologies are getting us used to doing everything quickly, to short and insubstantial messages.
- Mary had to make the most serious decision ever made by a human being: to say yes or no to God's proposal. She did not do it in a hurry. She took time. She asked questions. In the end, she made a decision that she did not have to regret, even in the moments of trial. That initial attitude stayed with her all her life. She became an expert in “keeping in the heart”. And, for that very reason, she was also a woman of strong and sustained decisions. The ark of her heart held treasures that enriched the early church. Many of the things we know about Jesus come from that ark through the filter of the evangelists.
- In fact, the treasure she kept was Jesus himself. The mystery was so great that it could not be taken care of by a superficial glance. Her whole life was an exercise in quiet contemplation, in quiet wisdom. The fruits are evident: she perceives the needs of the people and stands at the foot of the cross.
- During these nine days we have made a journey with Mary. With her, we have expressed our gratitude for our missionary vocation and we have opened ourselves to the vicissitudes of the Church and the world in this unique time that we have had to live as a result of the pandemic. May our response always be the “revolution of tenderness”!

We pray together

- For having intervened in the foundation of our Congregation and being our Patroness (CC 8),

Thank you, Mother, from the bottom of our heart.

- For calling us and being sons of your Immaculate Heart (CC 1, 8),
- Because you embraced in faith the lifestyle of Jesus that we want to continue responding to the divine vocation (CC 5),
- Because we give ourselves to you to be conformed to the mystery of Christ and to become co-operators with your maternal office in the apostolic mission (CC 8),
- Because you are our model in chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven (CC 20), in poverty lived as the first among the poor of the Lord (CC 23) and in obedience by which you devoted yourself totally as a handmaid of the Lord (CC 28),
- Because you are associated with the saving work of your Son and therefore, we can venerate you with filial love (CC 36),
- Because you are our mother and teacher for being the first disciple of Christ (CC 61),
- Because you are the formatrix of apostles in whom we put all our trust (CC 73).

Note: In addition to the concluding prayer planned for each day, the *Hymn to the Heart of Mary* can be sung today (cf. *Spiritual Directory*, no. 254).

CONCLUDING PRAYER

We thank you, Mother,
for calling us to be in the Church
sons of your Immaculate Heart.

In a world where sometimes
we disregard the voice of God
and we close our hearts
to people's screams and needs,
we want to be with you and like you
missionaries who make it theirs
“the revolution of tenderness”,
so that the Church may become home to many,
mother for all peoples,
and a credible sign of a new world.

In these times of pandemic,
help us to put the heart
where the disease has caused death,
loneliness, poverty and hopelessness.

Formed in the furnace of your Heart,
we want to keep the word of God as you do
and put it into practice with generosity and joy.

Join us on our journey,
so that, in imitation of St. Anthony Mary Claret,
our only concern be to follow Jesus Christ
and seek in all things the glory of God.

Amen.