



Halles Corners, 66-09-2026

HEART OF JESUS and HEART OF MARY
Source and inspiration for the life and mission of the Church

Greetings, and initial word:

- Dear brother and friend, Rector of the Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, Fr. Stephen Huffstetter;
- Dear Professors, Students, members of the staff and all collaborators of this Seminary and Theological School, which I always looked upon with the greatest interest for its role in the Church in United States and in the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus;
- Dear Superior of Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart in the United States, Fr. Vien Nguyen and all SCJ Brothers;
- All the invited brothers and sisters;

I greet you from the deepest part of my heart, full of beautiful memories from previous visits to this house and from the friendly meetings and relationships here established with many brothers and sisters from the United States and from different parts of the world.

Thank you, Fr. Stephen for the kind and honorable invitation to address this beautiful audience for the beginning of this new academic year. I accepted it, first due to the personal motivations that I just mentioned in connection with this house and the brothers and sisters that give life to this project and mission. Second because of the matter that was proposed that goes to the roots of my own vocation and mission in the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart that runs this Seminary and School. And third because, being now bishop of the Diocese of Leiria-Fátima, in Portugal, I found myself gradually attracted for the reflection on the meaning of a common way of greeting and identification among us in the Congregation: "*Vivat Cor Jesu! Per cor Mariae!*" – that could be translated for: "*May the Heart of Jesus live, through the Heart of Mary*" or "*Long live the Heart of Jesus, through the Heart of Mary*". It is part of this "Marian way" that I want to share with you today.

I'll do it, in the light of the Word of God, since I think that it is in this way that we can find the authentic roots and foundations of theology and spirituality. Only then, can we understand the development of Church tradition, in its biblical roots and the influence of the distinct cultural and historical contexts along history.

1. The heart and the human being in transformation

1.1 Some notes on biblical anthropology

In the Bible and in the ancient cultures of the Middle East, the concept of **“heart” plays a central role in the comprehension of the human being**. First, it represents, a concrete reference to the physical organ that moves and controls blood circulation but assumes also a special significance when dealing with comprehension of the psycho-sociological, relational and spiritual dimensions of the human person. However, we must be careful about the symbolic meaning of this language and about the differences between the biblical meaning and our use of such concepts today.

In the Bible, the heart is a symbol and icon of understanding, memory and discernment.

Ben Sira says about God's creational plan for man: *"He made them a tongue, eyes and ears, and gave them a heart to think ... He put his own light in their hearts to show them the magnificence of his works"* (Sir 17:6-9). Deuteronomy says, in relation to the past: *"Until today the Lord had not given you a heart to understand, an eye to see, or an ear to hear"* (Dt 29:3). While Western culture places love, affection and emotion as characteristic notes of the heart, for the Bible, the heart is, above all, the domain of memory, intelligence and discernment.

It is, however, an intelligence that goes beyond the intellectual sphere. **The heart expresses the idea of the centrality and wholeness of the person**, in contrast to the dispersion and fragmentation of life. To understand and to think with the heart means to perceive the reality within it.

In this same sense, **the heart denotes the interiority of the person, as opposed to superficiality** and temporal changeability. Isaiah laments the lack of stability of the people's faith, in these terms: *"They are near with their words and honor Me with their lips, but they remove their hearts far from Me"* (Is 29:13). With a beautiful play on words, Ben Sira establishes the difference between the wise man who thinks what he says and the foolish talker: *"The heart of fools is in the mouth; but the mouth of the wise is the heart"* (Sir 21:26). The very act of understanding and thinking involves the whole person: what we call the intellect, but also feelings, aspirations and relationships.

It is in the heart that decisions are taken and projects are made. Therefore, the purity or impurity of the person, good and evil, must be seen from the heart: from the person himself and not from external circumstances, as Jesus says: *"From within, from the heart of men, come evil thoughts, fornications, robberies, murders..."* (Mk 7:21). A person's worth, dignity and responsibility must be assessed from the heart.

But the heart is not a fixed and unchangeable reality. On the contrary, **the education of the heart**, in the culture of the Middle East, is the fundamental task of life. That is why we speak of a heart that is hardened, haughty, closed, or broken, humble, learned, wise. The heart is the objective of wisdom literature, to guarantee the happiness of the person and the success of their family in economic, social and spiritual relationships.

It is not difficult, therefore, to perceive that the heart is, par excellence, **the field of man's relationship with God**. God knows the innermost intricacies of the human heart. It is in the depths of himself that man perceives the signs of God, through attentive observation of creation and by listening to the voice of the Creator. It is fundamentally to the heart that the teaching of the Law is directed. It is not far away, but *"the law is close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, for you to do it"* (Dt 30:11-20).

1.2 The prophecies of the new heart for a new world

Israel's journey of faith has evolved throughout its history, from the times of the desert to the settlement in the land of promise. Then, with the development of new ways of life and culture, based on political and military success and sustained by the fundamental institutions of the temple and the monarchy. With the crisis of defeat before the empire of Babylon, the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem and the deportation of most of the skilled population, all these pillars of security collapsed. It seemed that God had abandoned his people: *"Day and night tears are my food, for they ask me all the time, 'Where is your God?'"* (Ps 42:4).

In this context of destruction and discouragement the prophets raised their voices, insisting on the action of God that makes possible the future, but insisting in the transformation of the heart, as the sign of a new dawn of hope: *"The days will come when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... This will be the covenant that I will establish after these days with the house of Israel, says the Lord: I will put my law on their hearts and engrave it on their hearts."* (Jer 31:31-33).

One of the most inspiring images of the first Covenant, which speaks of the future is precisely **the gift of a new heart, thanks to purifying water and a new spirit**: *"I will sprinkle you with pure water and you will be clean from all your impurities. I will purify you from all your idols. I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh."* (Ez 36:24-28).

The Prophet of the third book of Isaiah expresses also his own **mission as the fruit of the Spirit of God to give courage to the heart** of the humble of the people and to proclaim liberty and freedom, by the favourable presence of God: *"The spirit of Lord God is on me for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, release to those in prison, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord."* (Is 61:1). This full prophecy was read by Jesus and accepted as being fulfilled in his life-giving presence, starting from his own village in Nazareth.

At the light of the meaning of heart expressed above we can understand the deep significance of these prophecies. The water and the spirit are at the service of the transformation of the human heart, the entire person. However, this is not an announcement of an individualistic transformation, but rather the proclamation of complete salvation of the people and the renewal of the covenant. The new future will be possible, not through the political military or just social transformation, but by the recreation of the heart through the water and the spirit coming from God.

Summary: This symbolic characterization of the heart shows that we are not dealing with a simple physical organ that then becomes a symbol, but with an integral “image” of the human existence as a person or a human community. This is a dynamic image, especially when it remains open to others and to God, integrating memory and experience, intelligence and planning with openness and truth. Since the human being the “image of God”, his heart is always under construction, always in search, as Ps 63,1 says: *“My heart repeats: «Seek my face!”. Your face, o Lord, I seek”*; or, as St. Agustin says in his book Confessions, *“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”* Therefore, the announcement of new heart is always a prophecy for the future, a dream of God for the renewal of the world.

2. Jesus: the starting accomplishment of the prophecy of the “New Heart”

2.1 On the banks of the Jordan River

This symbolic vision of the heart in the biblical writings is particularly important when we speak about the “Heart of Jesus”. In fact, Jesus is a man, a human being, whose heart (his identity, revealed in his attitudes of listening, feeling, thinking, acting and hoping) can be contemplated according to the categories outlined above. He is the one presented by the prologue of John’s Gospel: *“the Word became flesh and took up residence among us.”* (Jo 1:14). Son of Mary and assuming through Joseph the royal tradition of Israel, Jesus has a personal identity as human being, *“Son of man”* by Adam, and son of Abraham and David, according to Luke’s genealogy (cf. Lk 3,23-38). But the Heart of Jesus – his Identity – cannot be expressed just in the categories of *“The Son of Man”*, since he is also the beloved *“Son of God”*.

All four Gospels show the task of John the Baptist, as a mission to make known this new intervention of God and to invite everybody to join this offer already present in Jesus. He proclaimed: *“One more powerful than me is coming after me; I am not worthy to bend down and untie the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* (Mc 1:7-8); *“I didn’t know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining, this is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”* (Jo 1,33).

What happens in **the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan** is a Theophany of the Holy Trinity: The *“sky was opened”*, expressing that the distance between God and the humanity was removed, since he came to dwell among us. The Spirit hovered above Jesus, confirming that he is the One who works with the Spirit of the Father and baptizes in the Spirit (gives the Spirit). *“Then a voice came from heaven, «You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased».”* (Mc 1:11). That means that the human life, of Jesus is the true manifestation of the Father in Heaven: his words, deeds and attitudes are the human face of the Father; He is the transparency of God in human flesh. This is what means *“Heart of Jesus”*, the dream/project of God for the humanity.

Not only: according to the words of John Baptist **Jesus is the one who baptizes in the Spirit in so that we too can become, in him, sons and daughters of God**, as says the Prologue of John's Gospel: *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"* (Jo 1:12-13). To each one who is baptized in the Spirit of Christ, are addressed the words from heaven: "You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter". This is the beginning of the new humanity and the announcement of the Church. The revelation becomes an invitation to accept the transformation of the Spirit, made by Jesus: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* (Mt 11:28-30). The human life of Jesus (his Heart) is the school of those who want to become real sons and daughters of the Father in heaven.

At this light we must see all the ministry of Jesus, after the baptism in the Jordan: he goes to the desert, impelled by the Spirit to discern his mission and refuses the temptation of a human messianism (cf. Mt 4,1-11); he casts every evil spirit, to liberate those who were slaves of all kinds of oppression and alienation (Mc 1,21-28); comes near to those who are victims of sickness, suffering and sin, touches the leper of misery, prejudice and injustice (Mc 1,40-45); rises his voice against those who use their power – including religious persons – to condemn and make it impossible for the people to access and understand the merciful heart of the Father (Mc 2,1-13).

In fact, **the new life in Christ through the Spirit implies two main dimensions**, according to Paul: First, the expansion of personal existence behind the limits of the human life, by sharing the eternal life of God: *"For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain."* (Fl 1,21); Second, the insertion in a new kind of relations in consequence of becoming sons or daughters of God, and therefore brothers and sisters, for a new humanity: *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation"* (2Co 5:17); *"It is not being circumcised or uncircumcised that matters; but what matters is a new creation."* (Gl 6:15). In this way, those who accept Jesus, and let their existence be shaped according to his heart, form a new humanity, transforming this world, like he did, in order to take part in the glory of the world to come.

2.2 Mary, "full of grace", through the power of the Spirit

After this first overview of the revelation of God's project/will, on the banks of the Jordan River, I ask that we go back about 30 years, to call to our reflection **another important figure in God's plan and in the path of Jesus, Mary of Nazareth**, the Mother of Jesus. She plays a unique role in the dream of God for the new humanity. A brief glance at the narrative of the annunciation allows us to be aware of some of the characteristics of this mission.

The description starts making a reference to another process of the Plan of God already on its way: *"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth"* (Lc 1:26). **The "six months" refer to Elizabeth's pregnancy and to the role of John the Baptist** in connection with the coming of Jesus. Between the two narratives there are parallels, but also significant differences. The announcement to Zechariah takes place in the temple, near the

altar of sacrifices, the holiest place in the nation; it is addressed to a consecrated priest, at the most sacred moment of the evening offering of incense, with which the prayers of the people were raised to God. The whole atmosphere breathes the faith of Israel. There, the angel announces the birth of John the Baptist who comes to prepare the people for the fulfilment of the promises of God, in a greater way than the best hopes of Israel.

The narrative of Nazareth is set in a small town, eventually in a family home, having as main figure a young girl, named Mary, with no title except that of being engaged to a descendant of the great King David, from ancient times. There is a big difference from the announcement in the temple, where the presence of God is marked and protected according to laws of separation and legal purity. Now, in Nazareth, the role of the temple moves to the house of simple people and the announced presence of God' Son will start beating in the womb of the young girl, Mary, who could not be even admitted in the most sacred parts of the temple.

The angel greets Mary with simple, but solemn words: *"Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you!"* (Lk 1,28). And, as she was puzzled by these words, the angel urged: *"Do not be afraid! You have found the favour of God."*, or "God looked at you with favour, with loving care" (Lk 1,30). This greeting shows that what follows is a free initiative of God, motivated by his love and care for Mary and for what is about to happen in her and from her. Being *"full of grace"* is not a personal merit of Mary, but the fruit of the mighty and creative love of God for her and for humanity.

The greeting of the angel is very similar to what the voice of God expresses later about Jesus by the river Jordan: *"You are my beloved Son"*. Mary is the first person to be called in these terms at the dawn of the new times. As future Mother of the new humanity, she is greeted and invited to accept this beautiful and loving presence of God: *"The Lord is with you."* Later, she will celebrate with Elizabeth what she is learning during this new reality: despite being an *"humble servant... the Mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is his name!"* (Lk 1,48-49).

And he goes on making known **the vocation and mission of Mary:** *"Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you will name him Jesus."* (Lc 1:31). And he goes further explaining the mission of the child: this Son would become the accomplishment of the word given to Abraham and David, a kingdom without end as the fulfilment of the prophecies and the answer to the hope of Israel. Mary certainly knew the Scriptural tradition about similar announcements of births with a special mission for the child¹. Questions and objections are typical of this kind of narrative in the Bible, with the function of enhancing the central message. Mary also poses a question: *"How can this be, since I do not know a man?"* (Lc 2,34). She affirms her virginity, but this would not be an obstacle, since she was preparing her marriage and the child would be born inside this family. But the question introduces the true meaning of Jesus birth.

¹ Cf: Ishmael son of Abraham and Agar (Gen 16), Isaak, from Abraham and Sara (Gen 18), Sanson Son of Manoah and his wife (Jg 12), The son of Achaz (Is 7,10-16).

Then the angel reveals the greatest mystery of the faith: *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so, He who is to be born will be called holy, Son of God.”* (Lk 2,35). What the angel explains to Mary is that her pregnancy will not be fruit of her relationship with her future husband, or another man; will not be just the continuation of the same succession of generations, but a new creation, by the power of the Spirit/life of God.

Mary accepts the invitation/mission proposed by the messenger of God: *“Here I am, the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”* (Lc 1:38) The formulation of Luke means more than “Yes, I accept”. First, Mary confirms the truth of her life, her identity: being *“the servant of the Lord”*. This is her human heart, fashioned by God to serve, identical to the Heart of her Son, the *“Son of Man”*, who *“came to serve and give the life as ransom for the multitude”* (Mk 10,45). Then she declares that she is ready to let the word of God become reality in her. She joins the project-dream-Word of God, who will become flesh in her womb. The mission of Mary will be united to the mission of her Son Jesus. This is also the perspective of the Prologue of John’s Gospel: *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* (Jo 1:14). In this way, Mary, the mother of Jesus, becomes intimately part of the formation of the new humanity through the strength of the Spirit. Under the cross, she will really accept extending her motherhood to the “beloved disciple”, which represents all the true disciples and the new humanity.

The Scripture also testifies the participation of Mary in the incarnation of Jesus and in His mission. The letter to the Hebrews, referring to the incarnation, puts on the lips of Jesus this declaration: *“Here I am (behold!): I have come, o God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book, to do your will (Hb 10,7).* This is like the declaration of Mary, accepting to be his Mother: *“Here I am (behold!), the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”* (Lc 1,38). The attitude is the same: to do the will (the project) of God.

This absolutely does not mean that Mary is simply a partner of Jesus, at the same level. She would never accept such idea. That was the temptation of Eve, the first mother of the humanity in her pretension to be equal to God: *“For God knows that in the day you eat of it [the forbidden fruit] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* (Gn 3:5). For Mary, the mother of the new humanity, born by the action of the Spirit, God is good and *“The Mighty one”* makes in her great things. She rejoices for being his servant. With Jesus, she learns that serving until offering one’s life is the biggest form of love.

2.3 The Heart of Mary: a Maternal expression of the heart of Jesus

When she accepted the proposal of the messenger of God, **the heart of Mary changed in many aspects**, namely her priorities agenda and decisions. She was a young girl, preparing for her wedding and dreaming of having children. But now, all this has a new meaning, logistics and plan. We could think that after the announcement of Gabriel, Mary would stay at home in prayer and in peace to protect her baby... but her first decision is to arise and go urgently to the hills of Judea. It was important to assist Elisabeth in her sixth month of pregnancy, and specially to bring Jesus to the world, beginning from Israel. The two mothers celebrated together the joy of

the good news and the active presence of God in the world in which there are taking part. This is also the image of the Church in mission that goes forth, always on the way through the world, as Pope Francis used to say, that forgets no one and brings to everyone the joy and hope of the Gospel.

The heart of this mother shows courage and endurance to accomplish the mission, and she had frequently to remember the word of the angel: *“Don’t be afraid!”*: Because of an imperial decree, she must travel to Bethlehem, with Joseph, precisely at the time of childbirth in precarious conditions. The message from heaven moves the heart of simple persons to solidarity and they came to share their humble gifts with these family of outsiders. But the persecution of a suspicious and brutal king, who tries to kill the child, is unleashed and the family becomes refugees in Egypt to escape violence and death. The entire life of Mary and Joseph – their hearts – were changed and opened for new dreams and challenges.

- This is not too different from what we see today in the life of millions of mothers, in so many wars and other forms of violence and miserable conditions that lead them to confront walls of abuse, prejudice and manipulation, to look for a better future for their children.
- Four years, ago a Ukrainian mother, a refugee in my Diocese with her own children and children of other families told me: “Bishop, we cry during the night because of our husbands and other families in war and, at dawn, we wipe away the tears and smile at our children, to give them courage...”.

Like these women with their children, **the vocation and mission of Mary will always be tied to the life of her son Jesus from the incarnation in her womb**. Jesus will always be the One who gives the Spirit, but Mary will be also present in the Church, teaching her to have the heart of a mother and saying, like in the wedding of Cana: *“Do whatever he tells you.”* (Jo 2:5).

3. The Pierced side of Jesus: Glory and revelation of the gift of life

3.1 The hour of Glory

We jump now directly to the point of confluence of the entire Gospel of John, which the evangelist calls **the hour of glory on Mount Golgotha**. This *“hour”* had been announced during the “first sign” of Jesus at Cana in Galilee, when his mother with a heart of compassion, calls attention of Jesus for the poor situation of this marriage, where the wine of joy and love is at an end: *“they have no wine!”*². Then Jesus answered: *“my hour has not yet come.”* (Jo 2,4). This short dialogue shows the heart of Mary, in tune with the heart of Jesus, in front of this couple that represents Israel and the world. Under the compassionate heart of his mother, Jesus gives in Cana his first sign to announce the moment of the revelation of true love and life, to complete

² It is worth noticing, in this connection between the Spirit, and the sense of sorrow and expectation, that comes from the rabbinic tradition that one of the five things that the Second temple lacked was the spirit of God, and therefore, the prophecy had been finished with the last prophets after the Exile.

his mission. During the Gospel, John keeps the expectation of this “*hour*”, until the Passover of Jesus with his disciples³.

From the biblical perspective, **glory is the external expression of a person's dignity and worth**. It is not, therefore, an appearance without consistency, but of its “weight”. On Sinai, God's manifestation before the people takes place in the presence of the Lord of the universe, impresses and frightens the people, with the unleashing of a storm of thunder, lightning, dense clouds (cf. Ex 19:16:22).

For the entire Johannine tradition, what shines through and best defines God is love. That is why Golgotha is the manifestation of God's glory, the manifestation of his love to the point of giving totally his life.

This is the hour of glory in three ways: first because it expresses the totality of love, as Jesus had said, “*No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends.*” (Jo 15:13); second because he is bringing the human nature – that he shared with us – into the eternal glory of the Father; and third because, from the Father, he will send the Spirit over his disciples. This is therefore the true revelation of the powerful and saving love through the death and resurrection of Jesus, as a gift of the supreme love of his Heart.

Then, in that “*hour*” of glory on Golgotha, John refers four important elements that reveal the mystery of the “Heart of Jesus” and the “Heart of Mary” and their mission: the role of Mary as mother of the “*beloved disciple*”, the thirst of Jesus, the death of Jesus, and the revelation of the source of the Spirit.

3.2 *Mary, the mother of the Church*

But before the conclusion of the revelation of the glory, **Jesus wished to associate his Mother to the future of the project/mission of the Father:** “*Seeing his mother and the beloved disciple standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son. Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.*” (Jo 19:26-27). Mother Mary, who was the One who declared herself servant for the project of God, had to continue inspiring, accompanying and taking care about the disciple that represented all the other disciples and the Church that they would form together. Faithful to her Son till the cross, she had to become, in the new house of his Son, Mother for all the disciples, urging for constant faithful renewal and reconciliation in the Church. At the incarnation she received Jesus in her womb, by the power of the Spirit and brought Him to John Baptist and to Israel will also receive with the disciples the Spirit of her risen Son to accompany their mission to all the peoples and nations.

³ Through the gospel, several times John refers to this “hour”, to indicate the death-glorification of Jesus: to the Samaritan woman Jesus says: “*The hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...*” (Jo 4:21). The opponents cannot arrest Him “*because his hour had not yet come*” (7,30; 8,20). By his arrival in Jerusalem, his final travel, he says: “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*” (12,23); Beginning the narrative of the passion, John notes again: “*Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end.*” (Jo 13:1). For the evangelist, this is not a tragic moment of death, but the hour of glory: “*Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you*” (Jo 17:1)

3.3 The thirst of Jesus

Then Jesus declares that all things had been accomplished. But nonetheless, *“to fulfil the Scripture”* He says: *“I am thirsty!”* (Jo 19,28). These words don’t reveal just the natural consequence of blood loss. For the fulfilment of the Scripture, Jesus is thirsty for the living-waters of the Spirit that will flow from his side, as he had announced to his mother in Cana (Jo 2,4) promised to the Samaritan woman (Jo 4,19) and to the crowd, in the temple: *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink... He said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive. In fact, the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”* (Jo 7:37-39).

When this promise will come to fulfilment, Jesus will have passed to the glory of the Father. Then this cry for water resumes all the life of Jesus on the earth, to fulfill the project of the Father giving the plenitude of life to the humanity. As he had said: *“It is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”* (Jo 16,7). His mission had begun with the announcement of the coming of the Spirit over Mary and his incarnation in her womb, now, he announces the coming of the Spirit over Mary, extending his maternity to the future, over the beloved disciple and the little group that had followed him until the cross. Only then his incarnated mission, will be completed.

3.4 Jesus' death and the gift of the Spirit

The glorification of Jesus concludes with his death, that John describes with simple words, without any dramatization of the cross: *“after Jesus had taken the sour wine he said, 'It is fulfilled'; and bowing his head he gave up the Spirit”* (Jo 19:30). He had come to accomplish the will of the Father through the gift of life to the humanity. He had spent all his life moved by the Spirit, sowing the Kingdom of God in this world and proclaiming the life without end in the world to come. With the announcement of the Spirit to continue this mission, he had completed the sense of his human existence, revealing his human and divine heart. Now, everything was really fulfilled.

The evangelist doesn’t simply say that Jesus “died” or “expired”. He rather says: *“He gave up the spirit”*. This refers, in fact, to the death of Jesus as giving his spirit (his life) into the hands of the Father. But it means also giving the Holy Spirit to those at the bottom of the cross: his Mother, the disciple and the group of women. This was the thirst to give the living water of the Holy Spirit, and the thirst to enter with those who will be transformed by the same Spirit in the glory of the Father. This is the revelation of the hour of the glory.

3.5 Jesus' pierced side and the gift of the Spirit

The evangelist John goes further showing the **lifegiving consequences of this moment that shed new light and summarizes the entire Gospel**. He says that, after the death of Jesus, the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two other crucified with Jesus, to abbreviate their death, but seeing that He was already dead, they didn’t do the same to Jesus. Nevertheless, to

be sure, *“One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out immediately.”* (Jo 19:34).

The evangelist invites the readers to stop in contemplation of what he describes. Blood and water stream from the open heart of Jesus. Blood is the symbol of life; shed blood denotes violent death, in this case a life given for the benefit of others.

What John sees is **the total love of God, revealed in the Heart of Jesus**, until giving his life for the humanity that he loves. This is so important that he solemnly attests in a sort of signature: *“And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.”* (Jo 19:35).

The evangelist **John adds two texts of the Scripture** to shed farther light on this solemn moment of revelation of the heart of Jesus: The first is from Num 9:12 and refers to the pascal lamb (a figure of Jesus) that, by his blood, delivers from death the families of the people of Israel in Egypt and opens the way to liberation from slavery. This is the new exodus, the new covenant. The second is from Zc 12,10: *“They will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”* The text probably refers to figure of the Servant of the Lord, in the book of Isaiah, whose death brings salvation to the people. The attitude of contemplation is what John pretends from the readers of the Gospel

After the resurrection of Jesus, these sources of life remain open, especially the wound of the side that leads to his human heart: *“Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, ‘Peace be with you,’ 20 and, after saying this, he showed them his hands and his side.”* (Jo 20:19). It is not a question of the scars of a wounded Jesus, but the symbolic expression of the language of the heart, his human and divine person, now resuscitated, alive and source of life: Thomas is called to contemplate these wounds, the signs of Jesus' radical love: *“Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and examine my hands. Extend your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue in your unbelief but believe.’”* (Jo 20:27). This is the invitation from the Heart of Jesus to every one of his disciples. Come and touch, experience my love and let your heart be reshaped by my Heart.

3.6 Mary, Mother in a missionary Church moved by the Spirit

After the resurrection, Mary, the obedient servant of the Lord, stays in the little group, composed by the eleven disciples and some women – probably the group that was with Jesus until the cross – and some familiars of Jesus: *“With one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”* (At 1:14). She stays in the Church; this is her place, her new home.

With them, **she is praying and waiting the coming of the Spirit**. More than anyone else she is aware of the need of the Spirit for the future mission of the Church. It was by the strength of the Spirit that she had received the Spirit in her human body. Now, in her unique roll of mother of Jesus, extended by him to all his disciples by the cross, she will always be teaching the Church to be a caring mother, for all her children, specially for those in suffering and danger. And she

will keep saying, like in Cana of Galilee, specially to those who exercise the service in this new house: *“Do whatever he tells you.”* (Jo 2:5).

According to the tradition, Mary followed the Apostol John until Ephesus, following the mission of the Church. From the coming of the Spirit upon her human heart, she had *“set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah”* (Lc 1:39) to bring Jesus, to John Baptist, his parents and Israel.

Now, obeying to word of Jesus, she follows his disciples among the peoples, as new Eve, to open the Church to the mission and to build from all nations the new world in Jesus, her Son and Son of God.

Conclusion

The spirituality of the Heart of Jesus intends to focus the attention on the human person of Christ, using the symbolic character of the heart as an expression of his love and total self-giving for humanity. This symbolic reading has its roots in biblical anthropology, which speaks of the heart to express a person's interiority, truth and integrity. Speaking of the Heart of Jesus is a reference to his human being, to his way of looking, feeling, thinking, pondering and acting, but also to his filial relationship with God, as his beloved Son.

In the Bible, particularly significant is the **prophecy of Ezekiel** that announces the gift of a "new heart" (new person), through the action of the water of purification, and the gift of a new spirit (new life) through the action of God.

The four Gospels see the fulfilment of this prophecy in Jesus, starting from his presentation by John the Baptist, the baptism on the banks of the Jordan River and his proclamation by God as his "most beloved Son", upon whom is the Spirit of the Father. John testifies that Jesus is the One who will baptize in the Holy Spirit, allowing the fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy. The gift of a new heart will be the gift of the Son, who makes those who follow him sons and daughters of God.

Jesus proclaims that in him **the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled (cf. Is 61) and that the Spirit of the Father rests on him** so that he may go and proclaim the Good News to the poor, open the eyes of the blind and proclaim the mercy of God. Then he departed, healing, freeing and welcoming and giving specially attention to those who were oppressed and victims of misery, sickness and exclusion, and calling everybody to learn from him, how is meek and humble of heart. From him, the Son of Man and the Son of God, we learn what it means to be "the beloved Son of the Father in Heaven" in human gestures.

The Spirit of sonship is also the creative principle of the Church, since the sons and daughters who are begotten by the same Spirit of the Father, being shaped by Heart of Jesus, form, as brothers and sisters, a new humanity, the Church, the laboratory of a new world.

The proposal of the Heart of Jesus is not only a poetic-theological synthesis of the Christian mystery. It is a journey of configuration to the person of Christ, of communion with the Trinity and of constant renewal to become sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in Christ.