

Homily of Cardinal Justin Rigali  
CMSWR National Assembly  
Mass at the Basilica of St. Louis, King of France  
St. Louis, Missouri  
October 14, 2017

Dear Sisters,  
Dear Friends,

This is a very special moment in the National Assembly of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious as you gather once again with Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Head, our Mediator, our Savior, to offer through him your worship to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

Today in her liturgical calendar, the Church gives us the freedom to celebrate that aspect of the divine mystery that we choose. Hence, honoring God's eternal design, we are celebrating the Immaculate Heart of his Mother Mary.

Right away we realize that the Immaculate Heart of Mary designates *the person of the Blessed Virgin* and it expresses *her immense love* for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Her heart likewise embraces with enormous love all those who, by divine adoption, are brothers and sisters of her Son, Jesus.

For us to understand fully the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Heart, the Church invites us to turn to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to see how closely Mary's love is patterned on the love of Jesus, who teaches all of us the meaning of *gift*. The sacred Liturgy helps us to do just that.

During the liturgical year, beginning with Advent, the Church celebrates all the mysteries of Christ, one by one. We begin by reflecting on the preparation for his Coming into the world. In doing so, we relive the expectations of God's chosen people over the centuries and ponder the riches of the Old Testament. With joy, we are introduced to the Birth of Jesus at Christmas and then to his Epiphany and his Baptism. We celebrate his Presentation in the Temple and subsequently the mysteries of his public life with his miracles and his preaching. The Church then leads us into Lent, and up to the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Forty days after Easter we commemorate his Ascension into heaven. We celebrate the deep meaning that each of these events has for us and for the entire community of the Church. Then, on that extremely important feast of Pentecost, which commemorates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we celebrate the gift of Jesus and his Father to the Church. Later, after this, the sacred Liturgy presents to us the great mystery of the Eucharist on the Feast of Corpus Christi—the feast of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. At this point, it seems that there is nothing left to celebrate of the mysteries of Christ.

Yet the Church, expressing her great genius, presents to us still another feast, after we have celebrated—so it seems—every aspect of the mysteries of Christ. This is the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What the Church calls us to celebrate in this feast is the motivation that

inspired and explains all the other mysteries of Christ. And this motivation is *love*. This is, then, what devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus means for the Church. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is *the celebration of the love that has its origin in the Father, who in the Holy Spirit loves the Son and sends the Son as Savior of the world*.

The merciful love of God is the whole reason for the Birth of Jesus, for his Epiphany, for his Baptism, for his Presentation in the Temple, for his public life, for his Passion, Death, and Resurrection, for his Ascension, for his sending the Holy Spirit and for his great gift of the Eucharist. The love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is truly the summary and the synthesis of what God has done for humanity.

It is important always to keep in mind that, besides being *the symbol of his human love*, the pulsating Sacred Heart of Jesus is also the *sign of his living humanity*. And this living humanity is united with his divine nature in the unity of his divine Person. But, since in God life and love are identical, the living human Heart of Jesus, who is the Word of God, becomes *the sign also of his divine love*.

Even here the marvels of God's plan are not exhausted. Next to the Sacred Heart of Jesus God has placed the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It is the heart in which, St. Luke tells us, Mary reflected on the message given by the angels and transmitted to her and Joseph by the shepherds at Bethlehem (cf. Lk 2:19).

The Heart of Mary is the heart that the Church in her Liturgy calls "the home of God's eternal Word" and "the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit." It is the heart that the Church further describes as "Immaculate," "wise," "obedient," "new," "gentle," "undivided," "pure," "steadfast," and "watchful."

In presenting to us this Heart of Mary, so closely modeled on the Heart of Jesus, the Church prays that we may have a heart free from sin, attentive to God's will and faithful to his commandments.

The Church then prays that we may love God above all things and seek to help others in their need. These words surely express the content of the *gift* that you, as religious, desire to give to God and his Church.

How effective your gift is, dear Sisters, when you make it through Mary, being inspired by and imitating the love of her Immaculate Heart! And how appropriate it is that the CMSWR, which itself endeavors to be a gift to religious life, should have as its Patroness the Mother of God, who through her Immaculate Heart, is the model of all consecration and every perfect gift!

May the love that you find in Mary, which reflects the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, inspire you in hope, confirm you in trust and be always the cause of the joy you experience in living faithfully the gift of your consecration in the religious life. Amen.