

SISTERS OF THE SACRED HEARTS OF JESUS AND MARY

**THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE
IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY**

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Dedication

I dedicate this piece of work to all the sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary who have accompanied me in my journey of faith either materially or through prayer; to the Congregational Formation Team that asked me to put in writing something on the spirituality of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I am humbled. I also in particular, would like to dedicate this work to sister Rosemary Clerkin who has inspired me so much regarding knowledge of the Congregation and putting in writing what she knows. I only met her a few times but every time, after feeding us with the knowledge, she would say, “what I have received, I pass it on to you”. From those words, I thought, what I am receiving, I too will pass it over to others and there is no better way of passing on the Congregation’s richness than putting what we have received, either from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or from other sisters in writing. May God richly Bless you all.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Almighty God for enabling me to write on the spirituality of the Immaculate Heart. Thank you to the congregational Formation team for having faith in me that I can write something on this matter. May all who read this spirituality come close to Mary’s Heart and the Heart of her Son, Jesus Christ

SPIRITUALITY OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

1.0 General Introduction

Our beginnings, as a Congregation were in Paris, when Father Peter Victor Braun founded the Servants of the Sacred Heart on the 17th October 1866. The English Province was officially recognized by Rome as a separate Congregation in 1903 and we took the name, the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Mother Winefride Tyrrell was the women who led us through that time of transition and served as our First Superior General from 1903 -1908. She is considered the Co-founder of our Congregation.

Our Congregation was founded to make known the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary to all those we meet daily in our service of love.

As a Congregation, we have a deep devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The focus of this writing is not so much on the Sacred Heart but on the Immaculate Heart of Mary, however, the Sacred Heart of Jesus cannot go unmentioned. As a family we are invited to emulate these two Hearts which are **full of grace**, full of love. We realize that these hearts are inseparable. That is why, in most images we see the Heart of Jesus intertwined with that of Mary just to show how deeply they are connected, how much love there is between Mary and her son Jesus. How blessed we are that we belong to this Congregation which has devotion to these Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

1.1.Understanding Spirituality Through the Eyes of Mary

Different people may have different perspectives of what spirituality really means in general because it is a broad concept. I would like to look at spirituality as connectedness to something bigger than I am as I try to search for meaning in life. Spirituality is my daily expressions to life, it is about **being connected to God, to self, to others and to nature** so that through this connectedness, I may find who I really am and what life is all about. Spirituality calls a person to lose oneself so as to find oneself. Like Mary, the mother of God, who by accepting the responsibility to become the mother of Christ, lost herself by **a single ‘Yes’** and gained heaven within her.

1.1.1. Connectedness to God

Naturally, human beings are meant to live in an **intimate cooperative relationship** with God. This is because we are made in God's image (**Gen 1:2**) and therefore need to have an infinite relationship with Him. We need to constantly live-in deep relationship with God because we totally depend on Him for our survival. Mary had a deep relationship with God. I cannot deny that God favoured her by choosing her before she was born, making her conception immaculate but she also had a choice to deny the favour from God. However, Mary chose to stay in the state of grace until she fulfilled what God had planned

for her life. Mary was always in ‘a state of connectedness’ with God before, during and after the angel Gabriel visited her to announce the birth of God’s only begotten Son.

Mary, after saying a single ‘Yes’ to participate in God’s salvific mission, became even more connected to God, because at that moment, Mary had become the Ark of the covenant, the indwelling place of God the highest. It was not an easy situation because the connection we are talking about here is **not the connection of presence but that of the spirit**; what is born of spirit is spirit and what is born of flesh is flesh (**Jn 3:6**). This is why people still judged Mary on the physical level that she had become pregnant without a man and concluded that she was promiscuous. Even if the community Mary lived in was ready to end her life, she never reversed her ‘Yes’ due to fear because she put all her trust in the hands of the one who had given her the mission and the Lord God saved her from her enemies and from the hands of those who hated her (**Lk1:7**). That was Mary’s encounter, that was her life, that was her spirituality.

As a religious person, it is good to understand from the beginning that choosing to walk in a close relationship with God, choosing to learn to listen to the voice of God, choosing to be different in the community because you are following a call within the vocation is costly. New names rather than those you have known of yourself would be given to you. Like mother Mary, one should never give up doing good or being good because of false accusations. When these things come your way, remember go deeper into your relationship with Jesus, cultivate your spirituality of connectedness with God in prayer and there, you will find not only safety but also strength and courage to forge ahead in the mission God is calling you to. Eventually, you will give birth to the truth and the truth shall set you free.

We, Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary are contemplatives in action, our lives are rooted in prayer, following Jesus and Mary as our example. In Acts 1:14, Mary and the disciples stayed together, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Our constitutions challenge us to make prayer the bedrock of our life (**No 41**) because without prayer, the Congregation cannot survive. Our survival as a Congregation depends on God thus needs to remain connected to Him in prayer. Like Peter, James and John, Jesus takes us each day to the top of the mountain, the place of encounter with God, the place of adoration, the place where we stand and hear God speak to our heart, the place of connectivity with God, the place where God gives us instructions’, “**This is my beloved Son, listen to him (Mt 17:5)**”

Think of a mosquito in your room who totally depends on your blood for survival. **In prayer, our spirituality becomes deeper.** We begin to see things with the eyes of prayer, with the eyes of God, because God gives us new insights. That is why, as Sisters of this Congregation, as Sacred Hearts

Companions in prayer, it is necessary that we renew our commitment to our practices of prayer as individuals. That also helps to deepen our spirituality, our connectedness to God. These practices which include **annual triduums** where we meet for three days to pray together, **Thursday devotions to holy hours** and **first Fridays in honour of the Sacred Hearts, holy hours on the first Sunday of each month** is what our founder wished that we put into practice from the foundation of the Congregation. **Holy Hours on the first Saturdays of the month too in honour of the Immaculate Heart of Mary will enhance our devotion to her Immaculate Heart.** However, we also have our daily community and personal prayer as well as days of recollection. All these practices and those revealed to us individually by the Holy Spirit must keep us connected to God almighty.

I understand that heaven is where God is. We should therefore choose to live in heaven by making God a reality in prayer. **Mary the mother of God, by a single ‘Yes’ became a living tabernacle of God and through her, the Word became flesh and lived among us.** She will continue to stand as an example to our Congregation through all ages. Therefore, let us stay connected to God through the Holy Spirit which God has put in our hearts and through the intercessions of the blessed mother of God.

1.1.2. Connectedness to Self

Connected to self means, self-knowledge. It is about understanding who I am and accepting the beauty of God within me. It is about knowing my identity as a child of God so as to identify God as my father. The person who knows herself knows how to express herself in the way that is acceptable to others. She is well integrated and knows what is best for self and others. On the other hand, the person who lacks self-knowledge and self-acceptance, the person who cannot identify the beauty of God in the self is like a ball that is floating in the air. That individual goes with the wind. When, for example, such a person is told that she is beautiful, she feels that way and when told she is ugly, she feels that way. The person who is connected to self has time for herself, listens to herself, knows her strength and weaknesses and is not easily shaken by the blow of the whistle. It is not surprising that a person who is connected to self, accepts her identity with all her weaknesses and strengths, the identity which is not based on what she has acquired, what she does, what she has studied, which family she comes from, but on God’s estimation that ‘you are my child and with you I am well pleased’ as in the case of Jesus in Mt 17:5. That person is able to relate well with others, is less judgmental of the weaknesses of others. This person is prayerful, has a deep relationship with her God within and is able to see God in all things, in the whole of creation.

Mary the mother of God, set apart for the mission of God, knew well what her identity was, the beloved daughter of God. Mary was highly favoured by God from her birth. She was connected to self and to God. No wonder when the angel Gabriel brought the message of the incarnation to her, when she seemed not to understand, she inquired; “How could this be, since I know no man (**Luke 1:34**)? And then, after an explanation from the angel, Mary identified herself as the handmaid of the Lord “Behold the handmaid of the Lord... (**Luke 1:38**)”. The question is, who am I, how much do I know about myself? How connected am I to my deepest self so as I can also connect to God and others?

1.1.3. Connectedness to Others

Connectedness to others is about having right relationships. We realize that we start living a true spiritual life when we build right relationships with the people around us. We come to know and appreciate ‘how much God is contained’ in each of us because, we are all made in His likeness. Like Mary, we become a living temple of God, and we know, the temple represents Jesus Himself (Jn 2:19, 1 Cor 6:19-20). We see that we start loving others as they are and at last, we will proclaim ‘**the God in you is the same God in me!!**’. Good relationships not only energize and delight us but also provide us with the challenges we need for spiritual growth.¹

Mary gives us an example, born in a family immaculately, attractive, beautiful and loved. She loved and allowed herself to be loved. No wonder Joseph set his eyes on her and wanted to give her his hand in marriage. Becoming the tabernacle of God did not take Mary away from her relations instead, it made her even more sensitive to other’s needs. That is why, in **Lk 2: 39**, we see Mary going up the high country to her cousin Elizabeth. What a sacrifice, a pregnant mother in her first trimester, going up hill country just to go and give a hand to her elderly relative! In the first trimester of pregnancy, many women experience minor disorders of pregnancy which make them so uncomfortable. Mary could have used that as an excuse not to visit her cousin Elizabeth immediately after she received the news of her conception, but she overlooked her own life challenges to be at the service of another. Emulating her would benefit our well-being and that of the whole world. At the wedding in Cana, Mary showed sensitivity by immediately noticing that they had run out of wine and entreated her Son to do something.

I must be quick to mention that it is healthy to have good friends in this search for meaning in life. Good friends are assets, if you have one, bless the Lord. Good friends make you feel that you are important, you belong, you are loved, you have arrived, and they make you taste the goodness of God.

¹ “Heart of Spirituality.” *Relationships*. Last modified, January 24, 2019, www.heartofspirituality.com

Make friends with members of your community and the community will thrive. Right relationships help you find a better connection with God, others, self and creation.

1.1.4. Connectedness to creation

Just as we strive to have right relationships with God, others, ourselves, we ought to strive to have a right relationship with God's creation. **God is Omnipresent.** He is found everywhere, in all things, in all creation. When we take care of creation, we take care of ourselves, of others and we remain in right relationship with God, the creator of all things. Pope Francis, in the encyclical called 'Laudato si' which is familiar to most of us, especially invites us as Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary to be responsible, taking care of mother earth just as she takes care of us. "We are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what He desired when He created it and correspond with His plan for peace, beauty and fullness"². We know that this is an important part of our mission because we identify ourselves with creation, '**integrity of creation**'. There is need to love nature and take care of it. Being in charge of creation does not mean abusing it but means, love, care and support. In doing so, we are positively living out our spirituality.

Below is what the policy of the sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary says about the care for the earth:

We see the beauty and pain of our fragile earth and recognise the interdependence of all creation. As co-creators of the earth, guardians of the planet, we commit ourselves to the task of preserving, healing and caring for the integrity of creation.

SSHJM, Eco-Policy

Anything that makes a person feel happy and peaceful, that makes one feel some connection to nature, to the surroundings, that makes one smile, is a spirituality. Therefore, it is important to have positive attitudes towards life so as to live a healthy spirituality and to develop our spiritual wellbeing

² Encyclical Letter Laudato si' of the holy father Francis on Care for our Common Home (Rome 24 May, 2015), 39

1.2. IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

The devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is one of the most common devotions which is honoured side by side with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Immaculate Heart refers to the interior life of Mary the mother of Jesus. It refers to her co-operation with the will of God, her joys and sorrows, her maternal love for her son, her love of God and all of humanity. It is about her way of life as a person, her connectedness, her spirituality. The Immaculate Heart of Mary is so close to the Sacred Heart. We realise that the feast of the Sacred Heart as we know very well falls on a Friday in June, while that of the Immaculate Heart falls on a Saturday the following day. That is why, drawing closer to the Immaculate Heart of Mary implies drawing closer to the Heart of Jesus which is Sacred and vice versa. This is because these two hearts are closely linked to each other. I am not saying that these two hearts are equal as that of Mary is subordinate to that of Jesus because the Immaculate Heart of Mary was only human while that of her son Jesus was fully human and fully divine.

According to the Catholic Church, in preparation for the incarnation of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, Mary was preserved from all stain of original sin because she was going to be the mother of God himself. That is why her birth is termed as ‘the Immaculate Conception’. This is a dogma whose feast began with a Papal encyclical by Pope Pius IX. this dogma asserts that “from the first moment of her conception, the blessed virgin Mary was, by a singular grace and privilege of God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of Humankind kept free from all stain of sin”. (I have brought in the issue of the Immaculate Conception to help us appreciate where the Immaculate Heart is coming from)

We know by faith that God does not live-in sin. That is why we frequently go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation especially before receiving the Eucharist in order to get ready our hearts for Jesus. So, it was with Mary. She had to be free from sin so as to bear the sinless Son of God.

The Heart, as we know, is **the symbol of the depth, the inner self of the person**. One will be known by the character she presents to others as having a good or bad heart. We Catholics address the heart of Mary as **Immaculate**. The Word. Immaculate means, perfectly clean, spotless, pure, total self-giving to God's will.

When I, as a sister of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary devote myself to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I am saying, I agree to bring humankind to God through the heart of Mary. I am consecrated to Mary’s immaculate Heart as a way of drawing closer to the Heart of Jesus her Son, to God Himself. I am saying yes to suffering with her Son Jesus Christ especially in the poor. I am saying yes to making

reparation to atone for the sins of the world committed against her heart, for the many insults her heart suffers from those who do not appreciate her worth. Insults such as ‘she is just an envelope containing a worthy letter and once that is received, the envelope is thrown away’. How is it possible that one can honour the child and treat the mother with contempt? In honouring the Immaculate Heart of Mary with undivided attention, we are appreciating her single ‘yes’ to becoming the mother of God, we are honouring the love she gave to Jesus her son and to humanity.

In this devotion, as indeed in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I look at the heart of Mary with regards to **her humanity**. In the Gospel of (Luke 1:38) I look at the heart of Mary which is docile to the word of God. To the angel’s request that Mary becomes the mother of the only Son of God, she says’ “Behold the handmaid of Lord, let it be done to me according to your word” (**Luke 1:38**). The heart of Mary accepts God’s mission, the salvific mission of God. The mission to cooperate in the redemptive sufferings with her son.

We see in the life of Mary, as a woman and mother, that her heart was full of compassion to those who were in need. When they ran out of wine at the wedding feast at Cana, not only did Mary listen to their cry and feel with them but she also interceded for them in (**John 2:3-11**). Mary went to Jesus and said, “They have no wine”, and back to her children and said, “Do whatever my Son tells you” (**John 2:5**). So, at her intercession, Jesus changed water into wine (This was the first sign Jesus performed when He started His public ministry). Mary does the same for me, I should do the same for others, especially those in need. I have Mother Mary as my teacher and through this devotion, I have agreed to cooperate with her. Therefore, with her, I should intercede for the needs of the people to Jesus.

As a Sister of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, I am very much aware I exist on this earth because God wills it. I am here not for myself but for others. Like Jesus, I am here and now that others may have life through me and have it to the full (**John 10:10**). I also realize that Mary has no voice but mine, she has no feet to accompany Jesus but mine and she has no hands to touch those in need but mine. For the sake of Christ, I will do this, it is my spirituality, it is my life. (Mother Winfred Tyrrell 1903)”.

(Lk 2:19. Mary kept all things in her heart Luke 2:19, 51. She pondered, she contemplated the mysteries of God as they were being revealed to her day by day so as to better understand what they could mean for her life. Looking at Mary at the foot of the cross, she stands before her suffering son,

together with her son, her heart was Pierced and bled for love of humankind. Her heart was not outwardly Pierced on the cross but inwardly. I can say two hearts closely linked to each other were pierced and bled for love of humanity. Mary continues to stand with us in moments of pain and suffering. Through her intercession, we get what we need from Jesus. No other person understands the Heart of Jesus as Mary does.

The devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is about - Mary's purity of heart - Her total self-giving to God's will - Her undivided attention. Her service of love. We sisters are to be mothers who listens to the cry of God's people and respond to lessen their pain in any way possible. Like Mary, we are called to be contemplative in action, to pray, to listen to the call of God each day and to work for our own salvation and the salvation of many. We are here to intercede for our fellow Christians before the Heart of Jesus who loves every person unconditionally.

1.3.Mother Winfred Tyrrell and the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Mother Winfred Tyrrell, the Co-founder with Father Peter Victor Braun of our Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, had great devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. That is why, when she was asked by Fr. Peter Victor Braun, by what name the new separate Congregation was to be called, she exclaimed '**not only will this new Congregation have devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus but also to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.**' Therefore, this Congregation will be called, '**Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary**'. When asked why she wanted to add the devotion to the Immaculate Heart, Mother Winfred explained without delay:

"Because Mary was a great but humble woman who was always ready to do God's will.

This Congregation should take after her. There are also other qualities we can learn from Mary she said, for example, Mary was a contemplative woman who pondered the secrets of God in her heart (Luke 2:19) that is why we, the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, should be contemplatives in action, praying at all times even as we work".

Therefore, the new Congregation was given the name of 'Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary' from 1903. By the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, mother Winfred Tyrrell gave something to the character of the newly separated Congregation which had its origin from the Servants of the Sacred Hearts in France. Being a superior general from **1903 to 1908**, she ensured that the sisters she led lived in humility, simplicity and obedience with great zeal to serve the Lord, following the example of Mary mother of God. This spirit you can easily detect in the members of the Congregation of the sisters of the

Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary today. She ensured that the Congregation continued not only with devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus but also to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Mother Winfred believed that one way we can give honour to Mary is to say our daily Rosary, to have holy hours on first Saturday of the month just as we have on first Fridays in honour of the Sacred Heart and to worthily celebrate her feast of the Immaculate Heart which falls on a Saturday following Friday the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

Mother Winfred Tyrrell believed that whatever the sisters achieved especially at the beginning of the Congregation was achieved by the help of Mary. That is why, at the end of each prayer, the sisters acknowledged Mary by saying “may the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved, Immaculate Heart of Mary pray for us”. This is how we, as Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary end our prayer even today.

Mother Winfred wisely discerned the mission of the new separate congregation in line with the ‘founder’s ‘charism’³. She never forgot that the new Congregation was there to make known the love of God to all the people they met in their service of love, but with the help of Mary. She had to go through many challenges with courage to ensure that the Congregation stood firmly and independently.

Whenever mother Winfred Tyrrell, together with her Sisters, went through difficulties she would always say, “remember, we are standing at the foot of the cross with Mary. After death will follow the resurrection”. A prayerful and influential woman she was taking Mother Mary as an example. “My sisters”, she often said, “let us follow the example of Mary and we must never give up on prayer. Let the Rosary bring you closer to Jesus and Mary”.

Listening to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, discerning them, so as to give birth to a Congregation is not easy at all. It is like a woman bringing new life through birth. One has to go through many challenges and pain. The consolation is that the Holy Spirit continues to guide an individual until the passion and compassion is brought forth to the society undergoing sufferings and indifferences.

MAY THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS BE EVERYWHERE LOVED IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY PRAY FOR US

By Sr. Trinita Putapo (SSHJM)

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³Rosemary Clerkin, Graced by the living God: Mother Winfred Tyrrell SSHJM (1907), 41-43.