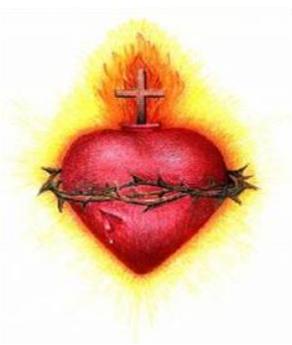


Blessed Alphonse Marie and her Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

A Prayer of Bl. Alphonse Marie to the Heart of Jesus



Jesus, give the grace to keep my heart pure
throughout my life,
so I can serve you in purity.
It is not only in name that I want to remain a virgin;
my heart, too, shall be adorned with those virtues
that you expect of a virgin.
My Divine Spouse,
I drive my heart into yours.
Take it and give me yours.
Yet, I live, no longer I, but only in God.
I offer myself every day only to God.
In every moment I offer my body, will, heart,
and my desires only to Him. Amen.



It is the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As the followers of Blessed Alphonse Marie, and according to her example, we venerate and deeply experience this devotion.

Let us explore, why Blessed Alphonse Marie venerated the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the Original Rule, which she wrote for the new Congregation, we observe an extraordinary devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

How she grew to this devotion? What it meant for her heart? What led, yet a little Elizabeth, to venerate Jesus' Heart so much that she put it at the very beginning of the Original Rule?

“Order of the Sisters of the Divine Redeemer was founded for the honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary... The Order is founded to honor these most holy Hearts, chiefly through imitating them in their charity toward those who suffer in need, which is actually the most beautiful way of honoring them.”

Let us ask, where shall we find a heart more filled with mercy toward the sick and the miserable, than the Heart of Jesus?

Open the Gospel and there you will find every step of the Son of God characterized by beneficent goodness toward the poor and the oppressed. A single word of the afflicted one or of his relatives was sufficient to touch the sympathetic Heart of Jesus: "If you will, you can make me clean!" said the leper to him. And Jesus immediately answered: "I will. Be clean!" (Mt 8:2-3) Lord, my servant lies at home, sick with palsy and suffers great pains," said the Centurion of Capernaum. And Jesus answered, "I will come myself and cure him." (Mt 8:6-7) Jesus comes and helps all who ask him.

The prophet Isaiah gave the miraculous help that the poor sick would receive as one of the signs by which man would recognize the Messiah: "Say to all faint hearts, 'Courage! Do not be afraid. Look, your God is coming, vengeance is coming, the retribution of God; He is coming to save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy." (Is 35: 4-6) Just as our God the Father wants the Messiah to be recognized by the active love for His neighbor, so He wants an active charity toward our neighbor to be the sign whereby His disciples shall be recognized. "Thus shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13: 35) The Divine Heart of Jesus is to be the model according to which His disciples are to form their hearts.

The lesson of the words above calls us to examine what takes place in the devotion to the Hearts of Jesus in the spirituality of Blessed Alphonse Marie.

Was Elizabeth, in her spirituality, imbued with the respect toward the Heart of Jesus still before the writing of the Rules, or did she set an important place to this veneration after the foundation of the Congregation?

In France, the veneration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was spread since the 17th century through the visions of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. In them, Jesus made her know the love of His Heart. Later, the veneration was spread through the fraternities to parishes. It was Father Reichard, who established this Fraternity in Niederbronn, in 1824, when Elizabeth was ten years old.

In the parish register, there is an entry that little Elizabeth Eppinger became a member of this Fraternity on February 19, 1832, at her age of eighteen. Yet, the eager spreader of devotion was always Father Reichard, who also established charitable Unity. In this devotion grew and matured also young Elizabeth, later Blessed Alphonse Marie. It was just Unity, established to the honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which cared for the sick in their houses and those who were abandoned.

According to the Statute of this Fraternity, Elizabeth was called to align her life to Jesus according to the Gospel, who is very gentle towards the sick and those who suffer. “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

The aim of the Unity was caring for the sick and the dying, as well as spiritual support and the help to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Elizabeth was a very active member of the Fraternity, from the beginning. In the time when she wasn't sick, she participated in the activities with others. In return, when she was sick, the members of the Fraternity gladly visited her.

At fourteen years old, she received her First Holy Communion. She was a person, who naturally lived the Truth of our Faith, so during the preparation, she didn't have to memorize them. For her, the Truth of our Faith was not cold sentences, yet the object of Divine Love, Jesus' suffering, the Eucharist, and the Mystery of Redemption. She accepted everything as a woman with a warm, loving, and seeking heart. A day, prior to the First Holy Communion, she was deeply sad. She was distressed that she poorly obeyed the lessons of Father Reichard and she became sick.

She said, “I bear my sickness willingly as reparation for in what I have failed to do. My Jesus, I will faithfully bear it out of love for You. Make my heart according to Yours. Make it worthy to receive the Eucharist. My Jesus, I would gladly bear all sufferings out of love for You. Give me a heart according to Your Heart. Make it ready for You, so I can receive You worthily.”

As a member of the Fraternity and the Unity, she liked to listen to the homilies of Father Reichard about the devotion of Jesus' Heart and she prayed together with other members. God was for her a source of all goodness and graces. He is a God of love and mercy toward man who is stricken by sin.

Elizabeth soon understood what is sin, so she tried to avoid every sin. She wished to understand more deeply, how to prevent offending God and grow in love with Him. She became more sensitive to sin. She understood that sin is her self-will and she prayed, “Jesus, You know how dangerous is my self-will for me. I am afraid to offend You, please save me from it.” She had only one wish, “My God, I would like to know You better and love You more.” She felt within herself to grow her desire after holiness. It was not only a temporary tendency, but a quest which was written deeply within her and her heart. It developed within her with her age. All her actions and attitudes, from

which her life was woven, are penetrated by God. She often said, "I see God in everything, always, and everywhere."

The prayer was naturally spontaneous in Elizabeth's reactions. She always turned to Jesus entrusting Him her worries, fears, and desires and asking Him to be faithful to her promises. She asked Him for help to live according to God's will in her everyday efforts, as well as for blessing for everyone who asked her for prayer. She also gave thanks to God for the graces she received.

She considered the time of prayer as a special happiness, profuse feeling, and spiritual joy. Elizabeth's relationship to Jesus rested in meditation on suffering and crucified Christ. Attraction to suffering Christ never left her. She spontaneously and conscientiously venerated the five wounds of Jesus, and this way of meditation the Sisters learned after the foundation of the Congregation. This way of meditation led her quite naturally to think about love which Jesus showed us to reconcile man with God. Thus, she often made present the Mystery of redemption, which Jesus completed on the cross.

When she talked about Holy Mass, she emphasized the aspect of "restoration of the sacrifice of the cross". One can say that for Elizabeth meditation on Jesus' suffering rested in making present His suffering, so she could understand His love for us and awaken gratitude within her. She was penetrated especially with the moments from Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane to thrusting the lance into His side by soldier on Calvary. She poured the trust in God also to the poor, the suffering, and sinners. Many people witness that she touched the hearts of those who listened to her while she was talking about the trust in God. It happened because she was always touching Jesus' Heart. Even in that she saw the aim of her work, to pour the trust in God to the hearts of dying and to give a hope to the mourners.

Elizabeth suffered severely physically and spiritually and yet, she was always in good mind. "During my suffering", she said, "I always thought about what I promised to God in my childhood: to keep my heart pure, strive for holiness, and in everything to do God's will."

In a certain time of her life, many people wanted to meet Elizabeth. She called them to conversion. This kind of apostolate, which Elizabeth practiced for all visitors, among those were priests, is an appeal for conversion through sincere faith, because she penetrated into their hearts by her inner sight. There are countless "Thank You" letters, which prove it, from all those who took to their hearts her recommendations and confessed their happiness to have a chance to change their lives.

Thirty-five years of Elizabeth's life, until she founded the Congregation, reminds us thirty-three years of Jesus' "hidden life", which were to prepare Him for His "public life". Many events, which we know, show us that Elizabeth's intensive inner life began very early and it grasped the whole heart and mind of a child in the amazing depth of her being.

It was an on-going formation. Elizabeth attended Christ's school and His Heart during her whole life. There she formed her heart. To form, it meant for her, to accept the person of Jesus Christ in herself. To develop, it meant to let Christ grow in her in His perfect greatness. If she would like to let Christ grow in her, it should bring into her life unity of mind, will, and heart.

After the foundation of the Congregation and receiving the religious name, Sister Alphonse Marie, she approached God and brothers and sisters the same way. The prayer and activity were directed toward Christ; Christ was expressed in her prayer and activity. One can say that Mother Alphonse Marie was aware in all situations that were necessary to follow the same line and to walk this path. This line is Christ, "love of God, who became man", and who revealed "endless love and mercy of the Father", love, which is driven by fervent compassion. It is Christ, who has "the Heart" which reminded Blessed Alphonse Marie the calling of the Heart of Jesus.

How did Elizabeth integrate the devotion to Jesus' Heart to her spirituality?

Introduction to the Original Rules has a pretty nice paragraph, full of quotations from Gospels. It describes in a very nice way the spirit of apostolic mission of the Congregation. It talks about the poor, who have no one to help them. With the sick man from the Gospel, who for 38 years languished at the pool of Jerusalem, we would sigh: "There is no one to help me." (Jn 5:7). If there was anyone who answered this calling, that it was Jesus.

"After the Divine Heart of Jesus, there is no other heart more merciful than the most holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary." Therefore the Congregation "should honor these most holy hearts chiefly through imitating them in their charity." Even today, the value of the heart plays an essential role in the charism and mission of the Sisters of Blessed Alphonse Marie.

Just as Jesus, in part, was to be recognized as the promised Redeemer through the miracles and his active love for his neighbor, so he wants active charity toward the neighbor to be the sign whereby his disciples shall be recognized. "Thus shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13: 35) The Divine Heart of Jesus is to be the model according to which his disciples are to form their hearts. He is the merciful Samaritan to whose example he points and says: "Go and do likewise." (Lk 10:37)

What impact did it have on Blessed Alphonse Marie and what impact does it have on the formation of her followers?

"The spirit of the Sisters of the Divine Redeemer should be the Spirit of Jesus Christ." This key passage all the Sisters of Blessed Alphonse Marie in the world know by heart and by this they are recognized. In one word, they should be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "Yet, I live, no longer I, but Christ in me". These words lifted Blessed Alphonse Marie to the mystic level, "The Spirit of Jesus vivified her so powerfully that the life of Jesus was manifested in her mortal body. Jesus' life was an active principle of her life, behavior, and actions. Jesus worked through her."

As for spirituality, there is undeniable continuity between the first and the second period of the life of Blessed Alphonse Marie and her devotion to the Heart of Jesus. Even though the situations were changeable, her life stayed changeless on the same principles. She was always opened to accept new situations showing her rich abilities to manage situation. It was a fertile time of spirituality, which was radically directed to God and strongly suffused with the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

How is my relationship to the Sacred Heart of Jesus?

Our Foundress, Blessed Alphonse Marie emphasizes, "Remember, our God is a jealous God, He doesn't abide division of the hearts of those who surrendered to Him. Sisters, free your heart from all fleeting things. You know that He is jealous of the heart of His bride. If you only know what suffering you make to Jesus when you refuse to abandon your heart to Him, who desires to take it into His possession."

How can we express our gratitude to the Sacred Heart of Jesus?

Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the embrace of Your love we bend our knee in this exceptional solemn moment and want to express our love and renew our consecration.

In the life of a person, the Sisters, and our Congregation are moments when there is the urgent need to confess our faith, love, and consecration. The most important one was the Beatification of our Foundress, Alphonse Marie, on September 9, 2018, in Strasburg.

Sacred **H**eart of **J**esus – the source of life and holiness, knowledge and wisdom, looking from this present moment into the distances of the near and distant past, we are aware of our dependence on You. Accept our thanksgiving for the life of Elizabeth, Mother Alphonse Marie, her natural as well as her sacramental-spiritual life, which she received from You.

Thank You that she came into this world, for the gift of her catholic faith and the light of grace, which she received in the sacrament of Baptism and later in the Eucharist, Confirmation and consecrated life. We pray and ask to preserve the sacred heritage of her charism through her Sisters and followers, in whom burns the love toward God, the Church, people, and the Congregation. Sacred Heart of Jesus, the house of God and the gate to Heaven, growing in knowledge of Your love, accept the confession of our mouths and the consecration of our hearts.

Make our hearts like to Yours and light the fire of Your love in us, to be our honor to live and die in Your love.

Walking, in the spirit, through the periods, from the birth of Elizabeth to the foundation of the Congregation by Mother Alphonse Marie, under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of our Redeemer, through the intercession of our patrons and Blessed Alphonse Marie, we trust in You, Sacred Heart of Jesus, and we consecrate ourselves to You because we love You. May the glory, honor and praise be given to You forever and ever. Amen.

Blessed Alphonse Marie, united with the Crucified Christ and surrendered His Sacred Heart, you sacrificed yourselves for the salvation of souls. Thank you for encouragement that the one who contributes to the salvation of the soul of his neighbor, he secures salvation of his own soul.