



# PASTORAL DIMENSION OF THE HEART OF JESUS

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## 1. The Heart of Jesus in the thought of St. John Eudes

It can be affirmed that the center and foundation of the spiritual doctrine of St. John Eudes is the Heart of Jesus as a symbolic expression of the love of God that fulfills human nature; however, this divine gift is not always understood by the human being, who in his freedom makes decisions that distance him from his fundamental identity. The Eudesian spiritual proposal leads us to recognize that God's love is a love that looks at the situation of weakness and misery of the human being, his creature, who has strayed from the path shown by God. The Lord turns to him, gives him his friendship, seeks him out, becomes one of us in order to love us in a very personal way, so that we may discover him, accept him, and thus create a relationship so profound that we become one with him. The only possible response to such generosity, to so many manifestations of God, is to correspond to his love, symbolized in the Heart of Jesus. But to love Jesus, to love God implies love for the other, that is, an integral love. Such integrality, expressed in three different dimensions: the physical, the spiritual and the divine, is expressed by St. John Eudes with the affirmation that the heart of Jesus is constituted by three hearts that are but one: the physical heart, the spiritual heart and the divine heart, three hearts that are but one heart.

## 2. How do I incarnate the Heart of Jesus in my life?

The divine Heart of Jesus, furnace of love, becomes one of the great symbols of the love of God manifested in our reality through the mystery of the Incarnation. The eternal Son of God takes on our flesh, that is, he makes a deep and serious immersion in our human realities, battered by sin, and which are the channel of new and greater sins that go beyond the level of the individual, to strike with fury and in a growing way the communities and society in general. Such a situation demands an urgent response from us in these times. The reality of the Heart of Jesus, present in the Church and in our hearts, is called to manifest itself through believers as baptized persons, who have the vocation to be another Jesus on earth, understood in a spiritual sense. This reality demands, on the part of the believer, a permanent attitude of renunciation of evil, as well as a profound spiritual life that, carried by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, can be translated into concrete attitudes and actions in the different areas in which normal life unfolds. It is necessary to be aware that this "incarnation" of the Heart of Jesus in our circumstances demands firm faith, discipline and generosity in order to be able to move forward in a profound way resisting the mentality of the current (or culture) of the world in which we live.



### 3. How does the Heart of Jesus transform me?

The reality of the Heart of Jesus is often reduced to an imaginary reductionism, since it is limited to the image of Jesus with his heart outside his chest before which certain prayers are said. However, the reality of the Heart of Jesus is far removed from this reductionism, since, in the Eudesian doctrine of the Heart, it represents an encompassing concept of both the person and reality. This implies that the action of the Heart of Jesus is not limited to the sphere of piety, but embraces all the dimensions of the person and its implications on the circumstances that surrounds him. The various meanings that St. John Eudes gives to the heart (anthropology of the heart, in his work on the Heart of Mary) involve the level of personal history as well as that of ideas, the great decisions we have made throughout life, feelings, projects ("intentions"), attitudes ("dispositions"), spiritual experiences, the intimacy of each one, among other elements. The discovery and acceptance of the great love of Jesus for each one of us, for the Church, for society necessarily leads us to respond from faith, that is, from the acceptance of Jesus and our surrender to him, a process in which all the structures and the most intimate fibers of our being are shaken, purified and illuminated. This process is carried out with the action and power of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that the realities within which we move and in which our life takes place are affected and transformed.

### 4. Can we speak of a pedagogy of the Heart?

The Lord is the master and we are his disciples called to follow his formation process so that we can become another Jesus on earth. The journey from the awareness of our sins, from the "abyss of our miseries" to being another Jesus presents an itinerary that certainly implies a pedagogy (or andragogy) with certain elements to be taken into account. For this, we could also start here from the different meanings of the concept of heart, which can enlighten us. From this point of view, the path to be followed is therefore an integral path and, one might add, it is also a communitarian (synodal) path. As prolegomena to this pedagogy is our faith and the acceptance of the great reality of God's love. In both the Old and the New Testament God presents himself as merciful, as love, as gratuitousness and goodness that necessarily leads us to become aware of our littleness, our limitations, our mistakes, our failures, that is, our miseries. The need arises, then, to put order and cleanliness in our heart, for which we are not alone, but we can always count on the help of the Holy Spirit. A second stage in this pedagogy is represented by a growth in two great fields, that of prayer and that of work for the virtues with a special emphasis on humility. It is an arduous and demanding stage, but, at the same time, full of satisfactions and spiritual consolations, as well as temptations that must be overcome with effort. A third stage, which is more serene, is to reach the state in which Jesus is really the one who guides our hearts in each of its different aspects.



## 5. How do I express the strength of the heart?

The Heart of Jesus is a universal symbol that expresses different dynamisms in different cultures and at different times, that is, in itself it contains a force that can be interpreted in different ways but that, in the long run, is not a static or inert concept but always vital. For St. John Eudes the property of this symbolism of the heart is reinforced by another symbol, fire, which, in turn, has its own dynamism. As a result, in short, we have the dynamism of vitality, the dynamism of love, and the dynamism of ardor. The dynamism of the heart is not exhausted in the three aspects mentioned above, but rather, the theme of the Heart of Jesus takes on a greater force since it is about the love of God that gives life in abundance and that is inexhaustible. St. John Eudes uses the Latin expression *fornax amoris*, furnace of love, as a way of concretizing in an image the dynamism, the overwhelming and transforming force of the reality of love. From the point of view of love, in general, the strength of the heart has various forms of expression: words, images, poetry, music and other valuable aesthetic expressions full of content. But the core of it all lies in the integrality of attitudes that can give rise to such expressions, and that necessarily leads to initiating a dialogical process between two people. Love is offered in various forms, so that at some point it attracts the attention of the other person who freely responds to these manifestations through similar elements. Thus is born

the exchange of loving expressions: "I love you, you love me", and a current arises that little by little grows and becomes stronger to lead to a unity. This process becomes the best expression of love: the acceptance, the offering, the surrender, the consecration, the immolation of one's own heart in response to the love of the other. The other elements are only demonstrations of love, since in this field there are no demonstrations or proofs other than full surrender.

## 6. What is the pastoral care that flows from the Heart of Jesus for the Church?

The pastoral care that flows from the Heart of Jesus can also take many and diverse forms (which can be systematized in the various pastoral care that the Church has and that can be seen throughout history both in institutions and in persons). The symbol of pastoral care can be found in the open wound of the Heart of Jesus, called by some Fathers of the Church as the "best hospital", "the best refuge" that offers security to so many people in need. In turn, from the open Heart flows blood and water, which have been interpreted as the two great sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, the sacrament that gives rise to new birth, to new life, that frees from sin and expels the action of the devil, that makes us children of the heavenly Father, members of Jesus Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit, and the sacrament that gives eternal life, that unites us intimately to the Lord, the sacrament of love



through which we merge with the risen Lord and reach a culmination of mutual self-giving between God and the human creature. This implies a process of formation and strengthening that demands diverse pastoral care, in such a way that both individuals and communities become transformed into witnesses and disseminators of this same reality.

In addition to what could be called the "pastoral care of the wound of the Heart of Jesus", there is another way of looking at pastoral care, based on the aforementioned symbols of the heart and the furnace of the "fornax amoris", that is, of a love on fire and given for the good of all of us. In other words, it can be called the pastoral care of mercy, although, in a general way, all pastoral care is, in some way, a manifestation of the Lord's mercy. The emphasis we find in Eudesian spirituality is to assume with such depth the love of Jesus, expressed in the heart as a furnace of love, is not so much a spirituality elaborated as part of some project, certainly good and respectable, but in continuing and completing the same mercy of the Son of God (in the background, of the Trinity), which is the source of a continuous response to the needs ("miserias") experienced by the world throughout history and in different scenarios, is a source of pastoral dynamism that transforms and transforms us as baptized shepherds.

