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The LOVING HEART of A MOTHER



The Immaculate Heart of Mary

by

DANIEL A. LORD, S.J.

A QUEEN'S WORK
PAMPHLET

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THE QUEEN'S WORK
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THE QUEEN'S WORK

THE LOVING HEART OF A MOTHER

JUDGED by the wreckage, the annual Lakeside Parish Bazaar, Rummage Sale, and Supper had been a success. The little parish hall was still deep under tissue paper and ribbons and string and the thousand amorphous shapes that used and rejected cardboard can take. The booths had been dismantled and were waiting for the thorough but leisurely disassembly job that would in time—oh, in lots of time—be undertaken by the church janitor. The ladies and the few men of leisure who had spent Monday morning on the dismantling job had returned to their homes or their cottages along the lake, and Father Hall, with Dick and Sue Bradley, stood in the doorway giving the aftermath a final look.

“They had fun,” said Sue approvingly.

“And they left plenty of money behind,” said Dick with an eye to the business of the occasion.

“Nice how the permanent citizens of the town and the pleasant transients of the lakeside mix and like each other,” was Father Hall’s sighful comment.

“We can thank a tactful pastor that they do,” Sue said with a smile at the priest. “You treat the visitors of a weekend and the oldest inhabitant of the town exactly the same.”

“As if they had been lifelong friends,” Dick explained.

CLEANUP

"Well," said Father Hall, "they are good, dear, generous friends. And they turn out beautifully for the sale. It's a bit of a joke, isn't it? First I beg them to contribute whatever they think might be salable. They turn over their flowers from the garden, the candy they make or buy, the contents of old trunks and attics and basements, new things and old things, the useful and useless — and then I beg them to come and buy the very same things they gave me. It's not robbing Peter to pay Paul, but asking Peter to give me what I mean to ask Peter to buy back again."

They all laughed.

"The old hall looks a wreck," said Sue, "but such a nice, cheerful wreck. I suppose the only pleasant looking wreck in the world ——"

"Unless it's the ruins of an old English abbey," was Dick's erudite comment.

"—— is a hall after a successful party. And they all had a lot of fun, and, thanks be, Father, the parish ought to be a bit richer for the lean months of winter looming up on the horizon."

A rear door opened and the thumping sound could only be the slow and authoritative footsteps of the janitor.

"Good morning," called the priest as the slightly gnomish figure emerged, looking about it with complete disapproval. "We're really leaving you a mess."

The sound far back in the janitor's throat sounded like what it was: "As usual."

"But you don't need to hurry about it. There's no meeting until Wednesday night."

Dick spoke out of the side of his mouth: "What made you think he ever did anything but take his time?"

The janitor picked up and set erect one of the chairs that had been tumbled over. He seemed to use it as an ineffective hammer to drive a nail into the floor. But it was his way of expressing general disapproval of any goings-on that meant work for him, and his emphatic assertion that he was about to work when he pleased, as he pleased, and at the tempo he pleased.

The trio quietly closed the door on the outside and found themselves almost tip-toeing across the lawn. They knew when they were not wanted.

BROKEN RECORD

The late afternoon sun was soft, warm, and friendly as it slipped through the half-closed blinds of the priest's comfortably disorderly study and stroked the ancient furniture. Sue stacked the few remaining records, unsold at their record booth, on the table and turned toward Father Hall's old record player. Dick dived deep down into his pocket.

"Don't say that I'm not businesslike. Sue and I spent yesterday afternoon figuring our accounts. Dad gave us a check in place of the loose bills and change; and we beg to report that the record booth did a highly profitable business. We begged a lot of records for nothing and sold them at the price of collectors' items."

"Oh, yes," said Sue, diving into her purse. "And here is what Dick and I owe you for the records that we took for ourselves."

The bill was generous. Dad had made up the difference between what the twins were able to pay and what he thought should be contributed to the little village parish. "This is partly ours — Dick's and mine — and never mind how much of it is Dad's."

They laughed, and at the phonograph Sue slipped a record onto the spindle. "Here's an oldie, but I have always loved it."

"YOU'RE A SWEETHEART!"

The needle found the groove and the record began to play. The arrangement was good, even if a trifle on the sweetish side, and the voice was suited to the song: not quite contralto, not altogether baritone. Father Hall winced internally but said nothing.

"You're a sweetheart," sang the once popular singer, "if there ever was one."

"Can't figure why somebody didn't pick that one up at the sale," said Dick, and then the needle caught in a scarcely visible groove and began over and over again the same unfinished strain: ". . . sweetheart if there ever was one . . . sweetheart if there ever was . . . sweetheart if there ever was . . ."

"Turn it off," shouted Dick even as Sue reached for the knob. "A broken record, and we didn't notice it."

Sue punned, "A brokenhearted record, if you ask me. 'You're a brokenhearted sweetheart if there ever was one'."

"And lo and behold," cried Dick, "we're right back on the subject of the dear old word 'heart'!"

They all thought back to the discussion they had not so long ago been having about love and hearts and romance and courage. Since that talk they had been noticing the way everybody talks about the heart. Even the appearance of Father Hall's venerable but, oh, so efficient housekeeper with cokes and sandwiches didn't deflect them from what had been an engrossing subject.

HEARTS AGAIN

Sandwiches and bottles in hand, they sank into the comfortably contoured old chairs and returned to "heart."

"I'm really getting obsessed with the word 'heart'," said Dick. "Could it be the noun we use most frequently?"

"'Faint heart ne'er won fair lady'," quoted Sue.

"Hearty applause for that," said her twin.

"Hail and hearty might be my appraisal of your looks."

"I'll do until some stranger lays his heart at your feet."

"Not till he's first brought me a Valentine heart and a candy heart and lovers' hearts entwined in a bracelet."

"All symbols, of course, of his heart full of love."

"He'll wait with quaking heart for your answer."

"That's a funny one really," laughed Sue. "Makes the heart sound as if it were capable of earthquakes. Anyhow, I'm sure my answer will make him take heart again."

"Whereupon your heart will belong to Laddy."

Again they all laughed. Father Hall had been thinking too since they last talked.

"Yes, heart is a very popular word. Grahame Greene does a book, best seller at that, *The Heart of the Matter*; yet when I was a youngster, I loved an Italian novel called *The Heart of a Boy*. Then I recall a popular melodrama, *The Heart of Maryland*."

"Don't forget 'Peg o' My Heart'," suggested Sue.

Father Hall threw up his hands. "Honestly, we ought to drag out the Oxford Dictionary and see what they say about heart—except that it probably runs into pages."

"MOTHER-HEART"

Sue was thinking and paid no attention to his near dismissal of the subject.

"Mother-heart," she said softly. "The heart of a girl . . . the heart of a mother . . . the heart of a woman."

Dick scowled in mock irritation; "As usual, I see the American woman is taking over completely. Heart ceases to be neuter and becomes strictly feminine."

"Could be," said Sue, "at least for a moment. I was just thinking that in any talk about heart, you're bound to come back to us women."

"Which explains," said Father Hall in a matter-of-fact voice, "why the Church is so

much interested in the Immaculate Heart of Mary." They both looked up with renewed interest. "However masculine we make love, however strong and courageous the heart may be, nobody can long think of love or use the word 'heart' without, as Sue correctly says, returning to women."

GOD, THE SAVIOR, AND A WOMAN

Father Hall filled and lit his pipe, almost as if the individual movements were the punctuation marks of his comments.

"No Catholic needs to be reminded that our first love must be the love of God. Our whole religion is bound up with the love of the Blessed Trinity, as our whole lives are filled with the effects of that love."

"The provident love of God, the Father," said Dick.

"The love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus," said Sue.

"And don't forget the heartwarming love of the Holy Spirit," added the priest. "It was the coming of the love of the Holy Spirit that strengthened the hearts of the Apostles, frightened and cowering up to that time, and made them the unconquerable hearts of heroes and missionaries and martyrs."

"See how very masculine love can sound?" triumphed Dick.

"I could be a little jealous," said Sue, "using that word 'jealous' in the loosest possible sense, if it weren't for the Heart of a Girl, the Heart of a Virgin, the Heart of a Mother, and the Heart of a Queen."

The men looked at her in silent interest.

"Aren't we lucky," said Sue, her eyes bright and shining, "that we have the Immaculate Heart of Mary?" She hummed a little and then caught the words, "'She's a sweetheart, if there ever was one'." Her look suddenly became embarrassed as she paused. "You don't suppose Mary minds my singing that about her?"

"I think she loves it," said the priest.

TWO HEARTS INTERTWINED

"Just because people have used the word 'sweetheart' badly, is no reason for not using it to the top of its capacity. I'm not so sure for that matter that they do use it too badly. Dick, doesn't 'sweetheart' in slang mean just the best?"

"That's right, Father. Seems sort of funny when you stop to analyze it; but when a fellow makes a difficult shot in a game, we say, 'Boy, that's a sweetheart!' We even say that about a star athlete. When Ted Williams puts one over the fence or the school's best forward loops an important goal, I've heard fellows say, 'Ain't he the sweetheart, though?'"

"I heard a man refer the other day," volunteered Sue, "to his new sports model car as a sweetheart."

"Well," the priest agreed, "if sweetheart has a way of meaning the best, the outstanding, the tops, I am not shocked that you apply the word to the greatest of women. And I'm sure the greatest of women would think it a compliment.

“After all, among all the lovely hearts of mankind, what heart is like the heart of a mother? And what mother like Mary? And what sweeter heart than the heart of a pure, beautiful young girl? And who purer and more beautiful than the future Mother of God?

“That, we Catholics never forget, is the real cause of her greatness: the motherhood of the Savior, the motherhood of our God made man. In our devotions the two hearts are always intertwined. We think of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and that makes us think of the Immaculate Heart of His Mother. We think of the loving Heart of the Man-God and inevitably we think of the woman’s Heart that gave it human life.

“The Immaculate Heart of Mary is both a symbol and a physical fact, just as in the case of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. His Heart was and is a glorious physical fact, the sensitive organ that responded constantly to the emotions which He knew upon earth. His Heart is the symbol of that divine love of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity that expressed itself in the gentle, strong, merciful, courageous life of Christ Jesus, the Lord.”

A LOVELY FACT

Upon the walls of his study, Father Hall, long days ago, had hung the twin pictures of the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart which an old nun had painted for him.

“Sometimes I like to think how closely in tune were the Hearts of Jesus and of Mary.”

"Well," said Sue, almost a little impatiently, "that's natural enough."

"Natural," said Dick, "seems to me precisely the word. As natural as the closeness between the life of a mother, any mother, and the life of her child."

"What you've done when you both say that, is to lay your finger on the heart of Catholic belief. We do think that Mary was naturally a great and good woman. God would not have picked out for the Mother of His Son any mother but the best. That too is natural, isn't it?"

"I should think so," said Dick. "It has always puzzled me that there seem to be people who imagine that God picked out some nondescript nonentity for the Mother of the Son of God."

"A clear case," added Sue, "of the best is none too good."

"That seems clear enough simply because the reverse is so unthinkable. Imagine the Holy Trinity selecting for the mother and guardian and teacher of the God-made-man an inferior woman, sinful herself, defective of intelligence, of no social grace, no personal charm or beauty, second-rate, soiled, commonplace."

"Don't, Father," cried Sue. "It's horrible to listen to even when you don't mean it."

Father Hall unconsciously shrugged his shoulders. He was not being flippant but shrugging off the whole nonsensical idea that he had suggested.

TWO HEARTS AS ONE

"There is something very beautiful," said the priest, "about the fact that a mother

is the fountain of life for her child. Along with the exact science, there is high poetry in the realization that within the body of a pregnant mother beat two hearts."

"Odd," said Dick, "but the other day I was reading Chesterton. He made a point against sloppy argument by saying that you have to be careful of your conclusions: A man has two eyes, two ears, two lobes to his brain, two lungs, two arms, two legs, two kidneys — but don't argue from that that he has two hearts."

"But," cried Sue, and her eyes were brighter still, "in the body of a young mother there *are* two hearts!"

"And if the mother's heart stops, life ends for the child," said the priest. "For long, beautiful, dangerous-to-the-mother months, those two hearts are beating together. The heart of the mother is pumping life's blood into the heart of the child. It's a wonderfully close relationship; none other in human experience is quite like it.

"I'm no physician, yet I should imagine that the healthy heart of the mother would mean a great deal to the healthy heart of the child, just as her general health certainly will profoundly affect the health of her baby.

"And we Catholics don't think we need to reach into the realms of theology to believe that the character of the emotions that stir and influence the heart of the mother are most important for the child. It's a lucky child whose mother knows deep love for the unborn baby. A child that goes bad these days is usually discovered to be an unloved child. Delinquent children are often unwanted children."

"We were studying that in religion class," said Dick.

"How Mary must have loved that Baby who had been miraculously sent to her and whom she could love as her God and her own sweet unborn Infant."

"That is wonderful, isn't it?" Sue mused.

THE MOTHER'S SINLESS HEART

"If her Child was to be the purest of the sons of man, how pure the Heart of His Mother must be. It's impossible to imagine her Heart even briefly in the power of Satan."

"Doesn't Satan mean the adversary?" Sue asked.

"Precisely. And if the Heart of the Mother had ever been guilty of sin, Christ's deadly adversary would have staked a claim in the Heart of that Mother from whom Christ was to take His human nature."

"Golly," said Dick. "I never thought of that before. I wonder if Satan, during the temptations, when Christ let him carry Him about, wouldn't have taunted Him with that, if it had been true. 'Who are you to despise me?' he might have said. 'Once on a time, even your Mother was in my power'."

"That," and Sue meant it deeply, "that would have been dreadful!"

"Yes," Father Hall agreed, "dreadful is precisely the word . . . something to regard with real dread. Granting that God had the power to protect the Mother of His Son from evil, don't you think He would?"

"I certainly would, if she were my mother and I had the power," said Dick.

"Every once in a while," Sue said softly, "a girl looks forward to the time she'll be a mother. It scares her a little if she thinks she isn't pure enough and good enough and virtuous enough to give a young life to the world. Maybe it's not altogether true, but she imagines that she will pass on her virtue to her baby. At least she wants a lot of virtue to pass on." She ended more softly still. "I know that I do."

"Well," Father Hall said, "I don't think that the saints have been far wrong when they believed that the Heart of the Mother of the Savior was going to be the heart of a woman naturally strong, tender, pure; and that to her natural qualities God would add special protection. She just had to be wonderful, if she was to be the source of the human nature of Christ, the Mother of the Savior. When the angel said, 'Hail, full of grace!' he was describing a woman who was just that: full of grace—full of goodness, radiantly pure, notably unselfish, untouched by sin, never the slave of God's vicious enemy.

"That's why we think the Heart of Mary was immaculate. It was full of grace. It's unthinkable that it ever beat faster out of affection for vice, that it was excited by lust or stirred by anger or closed in greed or fluttery in a lie. That Heart would be much too close to the Sacred Heart that would take shape and know its first beats within her body.

"All through His life, that Heart of Mary was going to mean too much to Christ ever to be stirred to evil or miss a beat because of some pressure of sin."

THE HEART CLOSE TO HIS

Sue nodded thoughtfully. "The Hearts of Jesus and Mary were very close, weren't they?"

"Close as the heart of a mother and a son," said Dick.

"Mothers' hearts and daughters' hearts can be close too," Sue said, a little impatient with male monopolizing.

"Let's say like the heart of a mother and the heart of her child," said Father Hall, soothingly. "Once more it's the saints who have loved to think of the dear intimacy between those two wonderful Hearts: the Heart of the world's great and heroic Lover, the Heart of the woman who gave Him His human life.

"The Infant Savior rested on the Heart of Mary on Christmas morning."

Sue puzzled a bit to find the exact words: "Isn't there something about 'My heart watches'?"

"Never more true than of Mary on Christmas Day. The Heart of the young Mother leaped with joy, almost with a sinless pride, as she first looked on the face of her Child. It beat faster when she saw the star break out in the heavens and when she listened to the adoring songs of the angels."

"I'll bet," said Sue, "that her Heart contracted with pain when the villagers failed to come."

"Never mind the negative," Dick protested. "Think how her Heart leaped with joy at the adoration of the shepherds and then the wonderful fact that Wise Men

had come all the way across the world just to find and worship her little Son."

"Yes," Sue agreed, "you can be sure her mother's Heart danced when the camels came down the village street, heading straight for her little house and her Boy."

A FEARFUL HEART IN FLIGHT

"Don't you think," Father Hall asked, "that her Heart almost stopped when Joseph told her of the coming of the warning angel, of Herod's plot against the life of her Baby, and of the long, perilous journey ahead?"

"I can just see her," said Sue, "as she snatches Jesus up from His little crib and holds Him against her beating Heart."

"Somebody once called them — the Holy Family, I mean —" said Dick, "the first of modern displaced persons. Herod the tyrant, Jesus and Mary escaping from the secret police, and a desert to cross before they reached safety in exile. It would take a psychologist —"

"Or a mother," Sue intervened.

"—— to describe the experiences of her Heart on that night of escape and the days and nights in the desert."

"The beginning of the fulfillment of prophecy that touched directly on Mary's Heart. Remember?"

THE PIERCING SWORD

Father Hall looked up at the symbolic Heart of Mary in the simple picture on his wall. From left to right a realistic sword was driven across and through the Immaculate Heart.

Dick's eyes were bright: "And thine own soul a sword shall pierce," he quoted.

Sue sat up alertly. "That was the Prophet Simeon at the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple."

"That prophecy was interesting for one important reason: The wise old man knew that the Messiah was a sign to be contradicted. He foresaw the plots and conspiracies that would start with the savage trickery of Herod. But he also saw that the Mother and the Child would be so closely united that any sword reaching out to strike Him would first pierce the Heart of the Mother."

"Shouldn't a mother's heart be like a shield between her child and its enemies?" Sue made a statement rather than asked a question.

"Absolutely. Mary's pure Heart was to know joy; but it was to share every disappointment and frustration, every enemy blow and traitor's plot that struck at Him. They were too close for the joy or the pain of one to miss the other."

Dick shook his head, his lips tight. "I'll bet her Heart got many a scare during that flight into Egypt."

"And then," Sue added, "was mighty lonesome in a pagan land so far from her relatives and her friends."

"The lonely Heart of Mary in Egypt," Father Hall mused. "That would make a beautiful sermon or a charming mental prayer. And I suppose it was loneliness not for herself but because her Son had been driven from His own country and had to

live, the true and adorable God, almost in the shadow of the ugly idols of Egypt."

IN THE TEMPLE

"It's nice," said Sue, almost gaily, "to know that Mary went through all the heart-moving experiences of any young mother. Fear that things might happen to Him, joy at His first step, delight at His first word, worry when she could not get Him exactly the right food."

"A lot of poets have written about the hearts of young mothers," Father Hall agreed. "And Mary was the pattern of all young mothers."

"It must have taken a beating when Jesus was lost in the Temple," Dick said in a blend of slang and reverent awe.

"I'll bet her Heart almost stopped when she found that He wasn't in the camp." Sue was positive about it. "And it probably pounded when she raced back to Jerusalem. And then as the time went on and she couldn't find Him, don't you suppose her Heart felt as if a band of steel were being fastened around it, until she got positively breathless, less from running up and down the corridors than from growing fright?"

"You can finish that," said Dick, "with a statement of simple fact. When she saw Him, her Heart must have leaped for joy and then raced in wild relief."

"Well," Sue philosophized, "she must have had a contented Heart during the thirty years in Nazareth. It isn't really thirty from the finding in the Temple to His departure; it's —" she was mentally subtracting.

“Eighteen peaceful years” Dick gave the answer. “Our Lord was twelve in the Temple; He left her house at thirty. Eighteen years during which —”

He paused as if for words.

Father Hall supplied them.

HEART TO HEART

“It was heart speaking to heart, the Immaculate Heart to the Sacred Heart, the Sacred Heart to the pure Heart of the Mother.” Father Hall smiled at them. “There’s been an interesting advertisement in the magazines: ‘Your heart never takes a holiday’.”

“That’s physically speaking,” said Dick. “Boy, we’d be in tough luck if our hearts took a vacation or went on strike!”

“True,” the priest agreed; “but when we apply that in another sense, you may be sure that Mary’s Heart never took a holiday. It was much too much preoccupied with her Son. If Jesus grew in wisdom, as well as in age, He grew in human fashion. His Mother was busy teaching Him. She herself had been trained in the Temple school. Whenever she spoke—the Magnificat, for instance—she spoke sheer poetry. She loved the Scriptures and had studied them (according to tradition) under the scribes of the sanctuary courts, listened to the Scriptures on the Sabbath, and read them in the evening with her parents and then with Joseph. She was a true daughter of Israel and loved every moment of that history which bound the Jews so closely to God.

“When, as the Gospel says of her, ‘she kept all these things, pondering them in her Heart,’ she was tucking away the events in the life of Christ along with what was already there: the prophecies and types, the stories of the great men who prefigured Him, the promises of the Law which He would fulfill. That was a graciously stocked Heart.”

“I never noticed that before,” said Dick; “the Gospel doesn’t say she pondered these things in her mind; it says, in her Heart.”

“That’s right,” Sue pontificated a little. “She didn’t think them over coldly, objectively like some Ph.D. preparing his dissertation. She turned them over warmly, lovingly, because they meant so much to her.”

“And her Heart must have been even more warm, loving, eager, when Jesus, the growing child, sat at her feet and she taught Him what she knew, and answered His questions, and watched Him grow in wisdom and age and grace.”

“A mother’s heart full of pride,” Sue described it.

“Pride without vanity or conceit,” corrected Dick. “I always hesitate before the word ‘pride.’ It’s supposed to be a sin, and yet it often seems to me, in another sense, something pretty wonderful: pride in one’s family, pride in one’s children, pride in a grand Dad and Mother like ours, pride in one’s country ——”

“Or one’s religion and church,” added Sue.

A HEART FULL OF GRATEFUL PRIDE

"No doubt of it," Father Hall agreed; "in all those wonderful senses Mary's Heart must have known grateful pride."

"Grateful?" Sue hesitated over the word.

"I should say so," said Dick. "I'll bet she was grateful because the Boy Jesus was obedient and thoughtful and well mannered. And when Joseph died, and Jesus took over the carpenter shop and supported her with the work He did there ——"

"I'd forgotten that," Sue said. "But she must have been wonderfully proud of Him as He grew up into the fairest of the sons of men — that's a quotation, of course; I don't claim words like that — and when He walked with her to the synagogue on Saturdays, and when He stood out among the other young men of the village, so strong, wise, clever, considerate, respectful to women, comradely to men, and good."

"That," said Father Hall, "is what makes a mother's heart really proud: when her son is good."

He let that sink in and they accepted it in silent agreement.

"Yet it was all leading up to heartbreak."

"The Passion?"

"Before that," said the priest. They were thinking hard. It was Sue who got it; womanlike she knew what would break a mother's heart. "I know. When He said goodby and left her to go out and do His Father's business."

"How would a novelist describe that?" the priest asked.

Dick thought he had it and came close. "Though her Heart was breaking—how would that do?—she hid her sorrow bravely and kissed Him goodby."

Sue offered a variant. "I think the novelist would write that, standing in the doorway, His Mother strained Him to her Heart."

"Do you think you could describe the Heart of Mary that first night after Christ left?"

Sue shook her head. "I can imagine the lonesomeness, but I can't describe it."

"It would depend," said Dick, "largely on how much she knew about what lay ahead of Him."

HER HEART WATCHES

"Well, she certainly knew the Scriptural prophecies."

"Then she felt pride because she knew He would be a king and that His kingdom would be endless," said Dick.

"Her Heart knew confidence."

"But she also knew that He would be a Man of Sorrows, afflicted with our sins," Sue added.

"So her Heart knew the foreshadowing of His Passion."

"Anyhow," Sue brightened up, "she must have had three years when her Heart almost burst with pride. Imagine how her Heart must have swelled as she heard the reports of His miracles!"

"Don't you think she was in the crowds listening to Him when He spoke?" Dick asked. "I certainly do."

"Well, if she was — and I agree with you that she certainly was — she must have almost died with joy."

"That's my Boy!" Dick quoted, but from a very different context.

"She may never have said that, but I'll bet she felt it and showed it in her face . . . and felt it in the way her Heart beat."

"Once more," said Father Hall, "her Heart watches. This time she can't watch over Him as she did when she was first His Mother, then His nurse, His house-keeper, His devoted cook. Now she watches everything He does, every time the crowd runs after Him in admiration and wonder, every new disciple He selects to accompany Him, and every time He lifts His hands in a miracle."

"Now," said Sue, "she certainly has plenty to keep and ponder in her Heart."

"I wonder if that has anything to do with the fact that the Gospel according to St. John is different from the other three." Dick was thinking through something that had not occurred to him before. "After the Ascension, doesn't history say that John took care of Mary and lived in her house?"

"Yes," the priest agreed, "he did as Our Lord commanded, took her for his Mother, and protected and cared for her until her death."

OUT OF A MOTHER'S HEART

"You ought to be able to see through this more clearly than I, Father; but if the

Gospel of St. John is so distinctive and tender and full of love and rich in incidents the other Gospels don't mention, and if John and Mary lived together as son and mother for a good many years, I'd think —"

His voice trailed off as he left the thought unfinished.

Father Hall rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "It well could be. John was very close to the Hearts of Jesus and of Mary. He rested on the Heart of Jesus at the Last Supper and was the disciple whom Jesus loved. That would make a great difference in our outlook on the story of the Savior. And then, if night after night, he and Mary talked about Jesus ——"

"They probably," said Sue, "talked about little else."

"—— and if the things she had kept in her Heart, the things which Jesus had talked over with her in Nazareth, the small and precious things in the Public Life which she, as a woman, would notice — if these things she shared with John ——"

He too paused as he dropped into thought. He concluded slowly.

"It would have been a wonderful combination: John of the loving heart, Mary of the pondering Heart, comparing notes, talking of the one they understood because they had been pure and gentle and loving and had been so close to the Sacred Heart —"

"That might explain why the Fourth Gospel is so different. It would have to be, if it were written by John of the loving heart after years spent with Mary who had

stored and pondered in her Heart all that her Son had done and said."

THE LANCE AND THE SWORD

Father Hall suddenly changed his mood. "That's fascinating, but we can return to straight history as we watch Mary on the hill of Calvary."

"I often think that the station in which Mary meets Christ on the Way of the Cross is the most touching of them all," said Sue.

"Years ago," said the priest, "I heard a lecture on Oberammergau and its famous Passion Play that I've never forgotten. It's never been my good luck to see the Passion Play itself, but out of the lecture, I carry one unforgettable memory. The lecturer told of that particular scene: Christ staggering under His cross, and suddenly His Mother turning a corner of the street, and in a vividly dramatic scene catching sight of Him. I recall exactly what the lecturer said: 'Mary screamed. It was as if her Heart had simply broken in half and her scream was its agony. Then she ran forward toward Him, and the spears of the soldiers drove her back. Never before had I understood,' the lecturer continued, and his voice was deep with emotion, 'what that Mother went through. That scream taught me. It was a kind of climax in the Passion of Mary; the lances stopped her, but one of them seemed to go right through her Heart'."

"And thine own soul a sword shall pierce." Sue was quoting the Prophet Simeon once more.

"Sometimes when the Passion grows a little stale to us easily bored moderns," said Father, "and the stark words of the Gospels' record leave us chilly, it's a good thing to see the Passion as Mary saw it. To stand where she stood and be struck with the gusty roars of the crowd. To feel them surging up as far as the barrier of soldiers allowed them. To watch the priests reject their Savior. To see her face as she listens to each word He speaks. To know that there is no suffering He is experiencing but she shares with Him, down to the last bitter drop."

They were silent, for they were thinking along with Father Hall and they could not miss the agony of the Mother's Heart as her Son hung, a rejected Leader, a discredited Prophet, a King enthroned on a cross, the Victim who bears all the punishment merited by the sins of the whole race, the Head suffering for the Mystical Body, her Son out of her reach and beyond the touch even of her soothing hand.

They needed no words to make clear to them what any mother's heart would have experienced under the same circumstances. For when the lance was lifted by the soldier and plunged into the Sacred Heart, it does not take the heightened perception of a Saint to know that its blow went first through the watching Heart of Mary.

"And thine own soul a sword shall pierce," Sue said again, very quietly, as if the words of the prophecy really told the complete, shattering experience of that Mother's Heart.

GIVEN TO US

Again it was Father Hall who changed their mood.

"Beautiful, isn't it, that Christ chose precisely that moment of His Mother's greatest heartache, to ask her to mother us all?"

"I've always loved that scene," said Sue.

"I think a woman understands it best."

"I'm not arguing with a lady," said Dick, ironically, "but I think that a man might have some idea of the feelings of St. John, who, after all, did play a very important part in that incident."

"Three hearts played a part in that scene: the considerate Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate and Suffering Heart of Mary, and the pure heart of the young John. It's a heart-touching scene, heart-warming in its consequences, heartening in that it indicates how much Christ loved us and how at the very end He gives us as His next to final gift (His last gift was His own life) the Mother who had given Him life."

"As an historic fact," said Dick, "Christ gave Mary just to John, and John to Mary, didn't He?"

"Anyone who reads history correctly must have an eye for the deeper meanings of history. Seeing and reading about the fact is one thing; understanding the people who create the fact is quite different. To this day, students of American government, when they want to understand the Constitution, spend more time studying the intentions, the ideals and ideas of the men who formulated the Constitution than they

may spend on the actual wording of the document.

“So the Church has watched the acts of Christ with a deep knowledge of the character and Heart of Christ. A world without women would be a sad place indeed, as I have always thought Hemingway’s book *Men Without Women* was a tough, sad, depressing series of stories. To Adam, God gave Eve for his companion and joy, despite the fact that Adam already had all the blessed perfection of Eden. A religion without women would be a sad religion indeed.

“From the cross, Christ looked down on a world that had treated women badly. He saw mankind’s need for a perfect Eve who would not mislead them as Eve misled Adam, but who had already set the example of a lifetime of perfect service of His Father and Himself. He knew we were half-orphaned if we did not have a mother. And remembering the lovely care which His Mother had given Him, He transferred that care from Himself to John and to all of us. That is why He makes the relationship clear. He does not say to John, ‘Will you please take care of Mary when I am gone?’ He says, in a transference of His own happily remembered relationship, ‘Behold thy Mother.’ He does not in chilly fashion say to Mary, ‘I am leaving you now, but I am sure that John will give you a roof over your head and food for your meals.’ He indicated the best loved of His disciples and said, ‘Lady, this is your son.’

“The loving Heart of the Savior gave us the loving Heart of His Mother. The pure heart of John reached out in grateful

acceptance of this new relationship. And as Mary took John into her protective arms, he was the representative of our whole race. The Church has always believed that John was simply our stand-in. He took Mary to his heart and home; Mary transferred to him the love and care and motherly service she had long given to Christ.

“For shortly Christ was to die. He would ask of Mary the final heart-rending service as she washed His body and followed it to the tomb. She would then know the meaning of a lonely waiting heart as she never had before. She would wait for Easter, and then after the Ascension, she would wait for release in her own death without agony. She would, however, no longer be able to pour out her Heart in service of her visible Son. Soon He would be the risen Savior, the triumphant victor over death and sin, the founder of His impregnable Church, the ascending conqueror entering into the glory of His kingdom.

“His followers, epitomized by John, would be in a quite different state. The enemies who raged against her Son would now rage against her adopted sons. She would watch the Apostles go out to the reluctant, sullen, sin-saturated, idolatrous, greedy, and cruel world. In the ancient tradition of the Church, Mary maintained a home base for the Apostles in the upper room of the Last Supper. From that room she watched them go forth to the evangelizing of the world. To that room they returned in weary exhaustion to talk of their triumphs, as men can talk only to their mothers, to refresh their memory of the Savior with her clear Mother’s recollection of what He

did and said, to talk with her about their plans for the next missionary journey.

MOTHER OF MEN

“Christ knew that we need the virginal Heart of Mary as an example of the loveliness of purity. He knew that men needed the spotless Heart of Mary, the most loving Heart a woman ever knew, to keep high their ideals of human love. It was wonderful to have the divine love of the Savior. We needed also the shining fact of a glorious human love; and Mary would provide it.

“Children who had been taught of unhappy Mother Eve now had to see the sinlessness of their new Mother Mary. And mothers must have the perfect example of a mother’s heart that knew all their worries and anxieties, from poverty and homelessness to separation and the apparent failure of their sons, to give them the bright pathway of their career perfectly fulfilled.

“The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the symbol of the love of the God-man for all of us.

“The Immaculate Heart of Mary is the symbol of perfect human love given unstintingly to the God-man.

“That Heart is surrounded by the fragrant roses of virtue. It is surmounted, as Christ’s was, with a warm, brilliant flame—her pure love for her Son and all her adopted children. The sword that pierces it is that sword of prophecy, laborious days and fears in flight, the burdens of poverty and the trials of separation, the hatred and plots with which evil men beset her Son, and the awful

agony of the Passion she shared fearlessly but in willing martyrdom with her agonizing Son.

“The love of the Sacred Heart is the divine love of God-made-man for the human race.

“The love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the perfect love of a human being, Mary, Virgin and Mother, for our God and Savior.

“Together the Hearts make a wonderfully complete picture of love. They complement and complete each other. We need them both. God was good when He gave us the Heart of Christ and the Heart of His Mother and ours.”

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