

O Mother of our Saviour! how can we worthily praise your heart, if you do not vouchsafe to open to us yourself this sanctuary of every virtue, this living temple of the Holy Spirit, that we may contemplate the riches it contains, and that, imparting the knowledge of them to those who hear us, we may fill them with admiration, gratitude, and love, for the most perfect, the most affectionate of all hearts after that of Jesus. Ave Maria.

FIRST POINT.

Permit me, in the commencement, to make a supposition. Did we possess any venerable relic of the Mother of God; if her heart, or some portion of her virginal body, in which was conceived the incarnate Word, had remained on earth, and that the sacred deposit was in our possession, what use would we make of it? You hasten to reply: We would place it on the altar, and, not content with lavishing upon it all the honours the Catholic Church renders to the mortal remains of the saints we would add others still greater and more extraordinary, on account of the singular dignity of the Queen of Angels: in a word the heart of Mary, though insensible and inanimate, would be in our opinion the most precious of treasures. Behold what our religion would inspire us with, had this heart been found in the tomb! And because it is living, and glorious in heaven, where, intimately united to God, it burns with the purest flames of divine love, where it melts with tender compassion for our miseries, and is eager to share with us the happiness it enjoys, are we less obliged to honour it? and what strengthens its claims to our veneration, shall it only induce us to refuse it? Ah! let us lay aside these vain subtleties, on which I could never understand how sensible, well informed men could dwell for a single instant. If there be any one here, who fears to testify too much respect and love for the heart of the purest of creatures, I beg of him to consider how much God himself has loved the heart of man. This great God disdains not to acknowledge that he is captivated by this weak heart, that he loves it even to jealousy, that he glories in making it his conquest, and establishing his reign within it. Listen to him at one time commanding with sovereign authority: "Thou shalt love me with all thy heart;" *Diliges ex toto corde tuo.* Deut. vi. 3. At another, descending to a tone of entreaty, he says: "My child give me thy heart." *Præbe fili mi, cor tuum mihi.* Prov. xxiii. 26. See how he promises to show himself without a veil to the pure heart; to set no bounds to his liberality towards the upright heart; to extend his mercy to the tender and compassionate heart! If he is indignant against his people, it is because unfaithful Israel has turned away its heart from him; if he pardons, it is the humble and contrite heart; if he speaks to us, it is to our hearts his words are addressed: *Lorquar ad cor ejus.* Osee ii. 14. In a word, for otherwise it were necessary to cite the entire Scriptures, God has his eyes always fixed on the heart of man; he observes all its movements; he sees, he esteems in the entire man only the heart: *Dominus autem intuetur cor.* 1 Kings xvi. 7. And do not we ourselves say, a man is great, virtuous, estimable, and worthy of love, only on account of the qualities of his heart? Is it not the heart of heroes and of saints that we praise? And will any one now ask, why we venerate the heart of Mary? Have we reflected on the excellence of this heart: the more than human, more than angelic perfections with which it is adorned? O my God! when you created our first parent in original justice and rectitude, you beheld with complacency his innocent and pure heart; you loved it as the most beautiful work of your hands; you impressed it with the seal of your divine image; you established between yourself and it a correspondence, an intimate union of sentiment, of affections, and of will. But soon, alas! sin severed this happy union, your image was disfigured, the degraded heart of man received the odious impress of your enemy, and after having been the admiration of the angels, it was now become a hideous object of aversion and horror. So great an evil remained not, however, without a remedy, thanks to the infinite mercy of the Lord. Yet the contagion extended to the posterity of the culprit: all, according to the expression of St. Paul, was enveloped in sin; (Rom. iii. 9:) and during four thousand years the eye of God did not discover, in all the human race, a single heart which was not tainted with this fatal contagion, this frightful leprosy. Hence the disgust and indignation which made him once exclaim that he repented for having made man, because all the inclinations of his heart were towards evil. (Gen. vi. 6.) In fine, after so many ages, his divine regards repose on an object worthy of attracting them. A child of benediction appears on this earth that was so long accursed: preserved from the universal corruption, by a miracle of grace, a daughter of Adam is conceived in innocence, and born in sanctity. The Lord sees all the beauty, all the purity of the first design, on which he formed man, revive in her. Oh! with what delight does he contemplate this heart, which no stain disfigures, no germ of passion has corrupted, which not even the slightest fault shall ever render less worthy of his love! this heart, whose every inclination is holy, every affection celestial! Or rather, with what complacency does he therein contemplate himself, as in a faithful mirror, and discover his image that was effaced from the rest of mankind! Do you wish to know, my dear sisters, in what terms he expresses his tenderness for this cherished creature,