



BY THEIR FRUITS YOU WILL KNOW THEM PART I

by Sister Marie Marguerite

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Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

In his book, *Healing the Heart, the Power of Biblical Heart Imagery*, Dr. Joseph Grassi writes: The devotion to the Sacred Heart may disappear, but it must always be remembered that the heart is the most powerful human symbol we have. If this disappears in regard to Christ, we are in danger of losing his humanity itself, which is the core of Christianity...

With this powerful statement, the author suggests a key relationship between Sacred Heart spirituality and its representation of Christ as the Incarnate Word – which challenges us to persevere in the mission of St. Margaret Mary, and countless others, in our love and attentiveness to the Heart of Jesus. The centrality of Sacred Heart devotion is not merely a symbol or an image, but more importantly, what that image represents – Eternal Love, Mercy, and Goodness incarnate in Jesus. Through Him, our relationship with the Father is defined. The Sacred Heart gives flesh to the Gospel as we encounter Divinity made visible in humanity. It is a devotion very much needed in our contemporary society to remind us that God is at home in our humanity and remains present amidst our daily cares, joys and woes.

The Sacred Humanity of Christ has been revered by saints throughout the centuries, particularly, Carmelite Reformer, Teresa of Avila and our own St. Margaret Mary, St. Jane de Chantal, and St. Francis de Sales through their Spirituality of the Heart. Lives such as theirs give flesh to Dr. Grassi's reflection and provide food for thought about our own relationship with Jesus and how we, like they, might allow the love of His Heart to be incorporated in our own. For this discussion, I would like to present a brief sketch of the life of Visitandine Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart Bernaud (1825-1903) whose devotion to the Heart of Jesus enabled her to do a great work for the Lord...one that continues to flourish in our day.

Born Constance Bernaud in Besancon, France on October 28, 1825 and the eldest of 8 children, our sister first learned of the Sacred Heart through her Aunt Barbara at age 4. Although, her inclination for religious life was first made known at age 5, the family arranged for her betrothal at age 16. Widowed at age 20 after a difficult and childless marriage, Constance's strong faith was fruitful in bringing to birth the conversion of her husband prior to his death.

As the Feast of the Sacred Heart approached in 1849, Constance, now 24, confirmed her call to religious life during a retreat made at the Monastery of the Visitation at Bourg. She entered as a postulant on July 28, and was clothed in the habit of the Order on November 25, receiving the name Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart. On the First Friday of April, 1851, Sr. Marie professed her religious vows and embarked on



her "vocation within a vocation" of offering her all for the love and glory of the Sacred Heart. Sister served as mistress of the school at Bourg, ever fostering love of God and reverence for His Heart in her students, until her poor health required that she take on a less demanding role. Like a hidden stream of grace, this kind and simple soul poured forth her devotion to the Heart of Jesus into the Bourg community so much that on June 7, 1862, the monastery was solemnly dedicated to the Sacred Heart.

In December of the same year, the Monastery of Bourg received a letter from our Sisters in Annecy containing this sentence: "Our Lord complained to a favored soul to whom He had revealed His Heart that we (Visitandines) do not employ enough zeal in spreading Its devotion". On hearing those words, the sisters looked towards Sr. Marie saying: "It is up to you to find a new way to glorify the Heart of Jesu" and within a few days, Sister composed this act of abandonment which each sister adopted and signed: O my Jesus, I, NN, to glorify the most adorable Trinity, console your Divine Heart and save sinners, surrender and give myself fully and without reservation to all the pure love You have for me in order to please your Divine Heart.

In the early months of 1863, Sr. Marie had a vision of The Sacred Heart surrounded by a dial with the words Glory! Love! Reparation! She felt compelled to reproduce this image and entitle it Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart. Mother Marie-Julia, Superior of Bourg, on seeing the image, blessed and approved it allowing each sister to choose an hour of private prayer dedicated to the Heart of Jesus. Mother inscribed their names around the dial and on, March 13, 1863, the fledgling Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was founded.

An increase in the stream of grace flowing from the Heart of Jesus to that of Sr. Marie's, was soon to expand her vision for the new association as the Scripture texts of Palm Sunday, 1863, were read: Ps 69 "Taunts have broken my heart; I have reached the end of my strength. I looked in vain for compassion, for consolers, not one could I find"; and from the Gospel of Mark, "My soul is sorrowful even to death.... Could you not watch one hour with me?" These words had a profound effect on Sr. Marie initiating a period of intense prayer during the Holy Week that followed. As Sister earnestly sought Jesus' will, the mission of The Guard of Honor became clearer and its workings began slowly to unfold. Jesus had told St. Margaret Mary: I want to encircle My Heart with a crown of twelve stars composed of my dearest and faithful servants. Each star on the dial corresponds with an hour where Jesus is receiving the consolation of an adorer. Sister Marie chose 12 guardians – one for each hour: Our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, the Righteous of the Earth, and the Nine Choirs of Angels – as April was the month dedicated to the angels – to accompany the sister keeping her hour of watch in accord with her act of abandonment. Later, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 13, 1863 Our Lord showed Sr. Marie, in a vision, the piercing of His Heart on Calvary. The deep and lasting impression made on the soul of our sister enabled her to understand the relationship between its mystery and the role of The Guard of Honor. Each member of the association, standing spiritually at the foot of the cross with Our Blessed Mother, St. John, and St. Mary Magdalene, "must be present to receive the blood and water" from the Pierced Heart of Christ. The blood and water, in an act of love and reparation,



were then to be offered to the Father for the world. The members were to watch with these first three comforters of Jesus and continue to do so until the end of time – hour after hour, consoler after consoler – in a spirit of uninterrupted and perpetual adoration of Jesus on the Cross and Jesus in the Eucharist. Each consoler/adorer was not only to comfort the suffering Jesus in His Sacred Humanity through mindful attentiveness, but perform the apostolic work of obtaining grace and healing for His Mystical Body, the Church, by offering her thoughts, words, and deeds, united to the precious blood and water of Jesus' merits, to the Father.

Although Sister Marie anticipated that in time many souls would adopt an hour and pray the same formula of offering written for her sisters, the devotion remained within the cloister of Bourg until May of 1863 when the dials were shared with the communities of Annecy and Paray-la-Monial. Annecy's Mother Anne-Marie Babin responded that it took only a few minutes to collect the sisters' names and inscribe them on the dial that would honor the Sacred Heart in their monastery. This was done without hesitation, because the practice caused no singularity among the sisters and imposed no impediments in observance of the Rule. Each sister offered prayer, duties of the day, and all that God permitted during her hour in reparation and love to console the Heart of Jesus. To Sister Marie, Mother wrote, "O my dear Sister, I bless our Lord for having given you this pious idea". The community of Paray-la-Monial, meanwhile, to the sisters' surprise, reported that a similar dial had been created at their monastery with even the same guardians for the appointed hours. The only difference was the order in which the guardians were assigned; the Paray Sisters readily adapted their order to conform exactly with the dial in Bourg. This occurrence was viewed as a sign of the delicacy of Jesus and a confirmation that The Guard of Honor was His work – truly the design of His Heart.

By the conclusion of 1863, 112 Monasteries of the Visitation in Europe were enrolled in The Guard of Honor, and by 1864, membership among the laity prospered through the efforts of Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart and Marie Deluil-Martiny. In the tradition of St. Francis de Sales, prayer and holiness are the vocation of every person and The Guard of Honor quickly became a vehicle for all people to honor the Sacred Heart. Miss Deluil-Martiny became Sr. Marie's "right arm" as a laywoman and Visitandine before founding The Daughters of the Heart of Jesus whose apostolate is that of promoting devotion to the Sacred Heart through The Guard of Honor. In her youth, Marie Deluil-Martiny had made this prophetic observation: "The Church is on Calvary; now is the time to rally around the Heart of Jesus wounded on the Cross!" Is this not still true in 2011? Do we not need the Heart of Jesus more than ever?

The Guard of Honor evolved into a richly indulgenced pious association by 1878 zealously promoted by the Bishops of Poland and Pope Pius IX. In 1882, an archconfraternity was established in New York, and in time, confraternities were established throughout the Americas. Today The Guard of Honor remains a worldwide association actively promulgated by both Visitation Monasteries and the Congregation of the Daughters of the Heart of Jesus in 36 countries on every continent.



Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart zealously procured an increase in devotion to the Heart of Jesus, as a faithful and dedicated servant of God, by founding The Guard of Honor. After her death on August 3, 1903, the association spread with extraordinary rapidity. Of Sister it was written....this predestined soul was assured of leaving behind passionate souls dedicated to the Sacred Heart...The little tree she planted with so much love in the mystical garden of the Visitation of Bourg has already extended its branches to all parts of the world... By their fruit we shall know them!

In Part II of this talk, I would like to share more of the The Guard of Honor's fruitfulness in our contemporary world. Although it had suffered some decline in the latter part of the 20th century, the Association is enjoying a resurgence in active membership even in locales as far as the Congo and Madagascar. In Europe, despite its leanings toward secularism, our monasteries in France, Spain, and Poland have solid and faithful confraternities, as do those in Mexico and Latin America, honoring and spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart through a spirit of Glory! Love! and Reparation!. More to come....

God be praised!