

*Loving Christ with the Heart of Mary – Excerpts from Email of 2-27-19 (edited)*

Thank you for sending the recording of the webinar on attachment theory and spiritual relationships. I have found it very relevant and enriching. It has reminded me of how much fostering healthy experiences of attachment and affirmation lies at the center of my vocation—especially in opening the way for persons to experience the sheltering and protecting love of the Trinity, in which the whole of life can unfold in a spirit of childlike playfulness, freedom, and joy.

I also see this in a special way as the profound gift and presence of Mary within the Church. This is the central theme of my book on Marian consecration: I try to create the space in which people can begin to experience the Trinity, and Mary, as that secure base and safe haven that is so essential for our confidence in living from the place of our true identity as children of God, and in opening our hearts to the vulnerability which allows intimate relationships to flower. It shows me anew what the Church means when she teaches that her “Marian” dimension precedes the “Petrine” dimension and gives it meaning. In other words, the intimate, unique, personal mystery—the mystery of identity and intimacy—is what gives meaning to the apostolic ministry, to the hierarchical structure, and to the entire mission of the Church. All flows from intimacy and returns to intimacy, and indeed exists in order to serve this intimacy in the world and in every heart.

What you said about the current “buzz words,” *empowerment* and *self-care*—and their correlation with the two fundamental human desires for *identity* and *intimacy*—has been very enriching for my reflection. These efforts to find our fulfillment, happiness, or security through “empowerment” or through “self-care” reveal the innate longing of the human heart, but a longing distorted by sin and directed away from its true fulfillment (precisely through the fear of vulnerability). This is a fulfillment which is found only in the vulnerability of self-opening to God, in which his love is known and his intimate embrace is experienced.

This is a matter of returning to the spiritual nakedness of the Garden of Eden, to the state of childhood in an intimate filial relationship with God. Indeed, it is a response to the nakedness of Christ, Crucified and Risen, who through his vulnerable receptivity, his compassionate, womb-like tenderness, opens us to share ourselves vulnerably with him. When we do this, we gradually return into the safe haven of his love, and indeed, with him and in him, into the sheltering bosom of the Father.

It really struck me anew in my class last Sunday how essential *vulnerable receptivity of heart* is to truly welcome another person’s *vulnerable sharing* in a way that will be authentically healing for them. There can so easily be a temptation to keep another “at arm’s length,” especially when what they share seems beyond one’s ability to grasp or understand, and indeed “impinges on one’s space” by the depths of its brokenness and confusion. But it is precisely at the heart of the brokenness, where heart touches heart, that the unspeakable beauty of the person is seen, revered, and received...and held within as in a protective, gestating womb. And for this vulnerability to be possible, of course, the most important thing is that I let myself always be held, cradled, and sheltered in the Heart of Christ, in the bosom of the Father. Only in being a

little child before the Father, in being espoused to Christ, can I also offer my heart in a mature, sacrificial, and tender love for my brothers and sisters.

In this way, I think we can also understand how true “boundaries” are necessary for authentic love, for the ability to truly see, receive, and shelter the other. Yet these boundaries are not a “distance” or a barrier put up between ourselves and the other person, but simply our humble recognition of our littleness and our inability to “fix” them. We are not to *fix*; rather, we are to help to *heal*, and this occurs only through the tenderness of our human love, and our transparency to the love and the enduring peace of God. Yes, we receive them without reserve, we hold them lovingly within us, but not as if it depended upon us to solve their problems; rather, we simply shelter them in a tenderness that manifests the tenderness that we first receive from God, whose cradling Love upholds us always, and is the only thing that truly allows us also to unreservedly welcome, hold, and carry others, even in their anguish, darkness, and pain.

We see this in Christ in his Passion. He welcomes us unreservedly into his Heart, and he does not shield himself from us; rather, he earnestly desires to hold us, even when the “thorns” surrounding our hearts pierce him and cause him to bleed. But his gaze, tenderly fixed upon us, tenderly welcoming and enfolding us, springs from a deeper place, and rests in a deeper place—namely, in the perfect sheltering love of his Father, which cradles and upholds him, and which allows him also to hold us as he is held, without being overwhelmed or crushed by our pain. Rather, the beauty of his Father’s love, rooting the Son in his true identity, pours forth also in and through him to illumine our darkness and pain and to bring to light the unique and unrepeatable beauty within us, deeper than the brokenness, in this way unveiling our own identity as beloved.

This is how human love becomes most fully a “sacrament:” when my heart becomes a vulnerable meeting-place between God’s love and the beauty and brokenness of another person. This is a little sharing in the openness of the Heart of Christ on the Cross, who holds us as he is first held by the Father, who holds us in the Father’s presence, who receives us in the Father’s name and thus reveals to us the Father’s love. How tiny we are to participate in such a mystery, but it is precisely at the heart of our littleness that Divine Love pours itself out in this way!

Obviously, in what I have shared in this email, I have touched on *the spiritual core* of the charism entrusted to me, that inner space from which the elements of human community, of intimate relationship with others, and of womb-like accompaniment flow, and to which they return. They flow from *the Crucified and Risen Heart of Christ, and from the heart of Mary which is so intimately united to his own*. It is he who has entrusted this mystery to us, and indeed has placed it in the heart of the Church to be perpetuated, in every human heart, until the end of time. Yes, his greatest work is to “gather together into unity all the children of God who are scattered abroad,” to be “lifted up from the earth” and to “draw all people to himself,” so that we can discover our true *identity*, bathed in the light of his love, and can experience the deep, enduring *intimacy* for which our hearts thirst and in which alone we will find perfect happiness and rest.