

Being on Earth the Heart of God



Image: Gemma Farrugia

What is the Charism of the MSC?

Spirituality of the Heart has its foundation in and grows out of the vision of Jules Chevalier, a vision about a way of living the Gospel that has a particular emphasis on the compassionate heart of Jesus.

For the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and the wider Chevalier Family, the heart of Jesus reveals a God who is love and who loves creation intimately and unreservedly.

The presence of God at the heart of the universe makes the world sacred and this presence draws us to transcend our own being through love, a love that has as its source in the Heart of God.

What is heart spirituality?

In Jules Chevalier's time the MSC charism was known as devotion to the sacred heart. However, in the years following Vatican II the word 'devotion' was replaced with the broader term 'spirituality'. The MSC charism is something to be lived out, not just in practices of worship, but in one's daily life.

If we look to scripture, the Old Testament, God promises his followers a new covenant which will be characterised by a new heart and a new spirit...

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

(Ezekiel 36: 26)

Jesus is that new covenant and what a "new heart" really means is seen in his life. It is through Jesus' words and actions, his compassion, justice, hospitality, and forgiveness, that God reveals his love for us.

becoming immersed in our own life. To do that, we need to experience our daily losses and disappointments and the feelings that accompany them. We only grow by taking up our 'cross'.

- 4. Transformation through a new desire to share in the mission to be on earth the heart of God.** This final movement is the result of wisdom and sharing it. When we listen to each other's stories we affect each other. When we are hurt, we isolate ourselves but by sharing our stories we are invited out of isolation and into relationship again. Having been through the process of giving flesh to Jesus through our own experiences, we want to share our faith, hope and love with others, and they in turn wish to do the same.

Fr. Peter Campbell, MSC

Spirituality of the Heart leads us from our own hearts to the pain and suffering of the world in which we live. We are called to be God's Heart on Earth and to offer ourselves to be used as source of healing for the wounds of the world. We believe, as did Chevalier that this love is the remedy for the ills of the world.

"A Spirituality of the Heart is a way of living – a way of being in the world...a journey to be travelled (with others)... an energy that sustains and moves us, a dance in which we are participating... a way of being in the world, in relationship to self, others and God; a way of coming to rest within ourselves, at our deepest centre." Br. James Maher MSC

The Vision of Jules Chevalier

I would like finally to say something further of this understanding of God as a compassionate God, made flesh for us in the life of Christ. I find that more and more people are speaking of God in this way: perhaps it is an understanding for our times, perhaps I am now just more alert to it when before I would have passed by such comment without noticing it.

It has been a common lament of religious people, from the Old Testament on, that, faced with a set of God's commandments, we find it hard to follow them. I remember Bishop Cuskelly, back in the days when he was our student director at the seminary, commenting on some spiritual author who was talking about the need for strong willpower, saying that was not a matter of willpower, but of understanding - that the will automatically chooses what is presented to it as the overwhelming good. If this is true, then the important thing in our living is our understanding. I see the life and

embodiment of the phrase from that hymn: divine love in a human heart. So, when I read in Luke's Gospel about that great day of miracles when he calmed the storm, drove out the devil from the Gerasene, healed the woman with an issue of blood, and restored to life the daughter of Jairus, I am moved to consider, not only the divine power of Jesus manifest in what he did, but the divine and human love of Jesus manifest in why he acted. How he felt for his disciples terrified in the boat at the immense seas and howling wind; how he was able to banish the demons from the mind of the Gerasene, and have him sit with him, clothed and in his right mind; how he could give peace to the woman who touched his garment in the crowd; and how he comforted Jairus- "Do not fear; do not weep" - before he took the little girl by the hand and restored her to her parents. When I read of the funeral procession coming out of the gates of Nain, and of Jesus restoring the son to his mother, I bow before the revelation of the power of God even over death, but I marvel at the immense human compassion that prompted his action. 'God has visited his people' they said. (Lk 7:11-16). When I read the account of the raising of Lazarus, my wonder at Jesus' command over death is joined with wonder at the love of a God who was distressed at the death of his friend. 'Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean' a leper pleaded with Jesus. And he stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying 'Of course I want to. Be clean.' (Lk 5:12-13). Of course, I want to. And he touched him, a leper. God wept when Jesus wept over Jerusalem. This may not sit well with the philosophers who tell us of a God whose perfection implies that he is unaffected by anything his creation could do, but Jesus shows me that God's perfection really is love.

This is how Jesus is Messiah for me. He touches my heart in revealing the real love of God for us; not just something we say because we have been told to; not just something we know of God because philosophically we can decide that, since God has all goodness, God must be loving; but something we believe because we see it in the life of Jesus, where God became human for us. God is not now a remote figure in heaven, pushing buttons to control events on earth, but is here with us sharing our lives, rejoicing with us, suffering with us.

And that I think is the vision of Jules Chevalier, his Sacred Heart spirituality.

Fr. John Franzmann, MSC (2005)



lens, we know that Jesus' words and actions are God's words and actions. Such stories remind us we are loved by God but as Jesus is both human and divine, we also know that we, like Jesus, are capable of love. Bartimaeus continues "down the road with Jesus", he "sees" what he couldn't see before that he is loved and forgiven. It is this intimate knowledge of God's love and forgiveness, the energy of that moment that flows beyond Bartimaeus. He has given himself over to the encounter to Jesus and his nurtured and hope-filled heart wants to move beyond itself, to share its knowledge of love with others- expecting nothing in return.

Reflection

What Love Tells Us About God – Richard Rohr

Love, which might be called the attraction of all things towards all things, is a universal language and underlying energy that keeps showing itself despite our best efforts to resist it. It is so simple that it is hard to teach in words, yet we all know it when we see it. After all, there is not a Native, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, or Christian way of loving. There is not a Methodist, Lutheran, or Orthodox way of running a soup kitchen. There is not a gay or straight way of being faithful, nor a Black or Caucasian way of hoping. We all know positive flow when we see it, and we all know resistance and coldness when we feel it. All the rest are mere labels.

When we are truly 'in love,' we move out of our small, individual selves to unite with another, whether in companionship, simple friendship, marriage, or any other trustful relationship. Have you ever deliberately befriended a person standing alone at a party? Perhaps someone who was in no way attractive to you, or with whom you shared no common interests? That would be a small but real example of divine love flowing. Don't dismiss it as insignificant. That's how the flow starts, even if the encounter doesn't change anyone's life on the spot. To move beyond our small--minded uniformity, we have to extend ourselves outward, which our egos always find a threat, because it means giving up our separation, superiority, and control...

Love is a paradox. It often involves making a clear decision, but at its heart, it is not a matter of mind or willpower but *a flow of energy willingly allowed and exchanged without requiring payment in return*. Divine love is, of course, the template and model for such human love, and yet human love is the necessary school for any encounter with divine love. If you've never experienced human love – to the point of sacrifice and forgiveness and generosity – it will be very hard for you to access, imagine or even experience God's kind of love. Conversely, if you have never let God love you in the deep

Reflection Activity

As Brother James' Maher MSC's song 'Am I blind?' plays, take your heart and spend some time thinking...

Richard Rohr says, "If you've never experienced human love – to the point of sacrifice and forgiveness and generosity – it will be very hard for you to access, imagine or even experience God's kind of love".

Think about a time when you've been moved in a significant way to sacrifice, forgiveness or generosity.

How does God love you in deep and subtle ways?

Write a word or phrase on your heart, a reminder for yourself to 'see' as Bartimaeus did.

Final Prayer

Loving God,

May our eyes be open to the deep and subtle ways you love us. Help us to love and forgive as deeply as you do, bringing hope to our troubled world.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved.

Forever.

Amen

