

# THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITURGICAL FEAST IN THE HONOR OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Azam Vianney Mansha<sup>1</sup>

Today in the Catholic liturgy, the memorial of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary (I.H.B.V.M) is celebrated with a special formulary on Saturday after the second Sunday after Pentecost.<sup>2</sup> In the past, however, it was first celebrated by St. John Eudes on 08<sup>th</sup> February 1648, at Autun-France with the permission of the bishop. It was only in 1805 that Pope Pius VII allowed a feast to honor the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The following is a brief and concise presentation on the topic with a historical significance and development of the liturgical feast followed by a brief biographical sketch of St. John Eudes and his contribution in the devotion to the Heart of Mary. It will be helpful to state that presenter will be not drawing any biblical, theological and ecclesiastical Mariology here.

## Historical Significance and Development of the Liturgical Feast

In the patristic times, the symbolism of Mary's heart was seen as the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. It was also considered as the gift of God to humanity. For Richard of St. Laurent, the Heart of Mary is a visible sign of her faith through which she freely participates in the plan of salvation. It is through the Heart of Mary that all the gifts of compassion and reconciliation are experienced by human beings, said by Godfrey of Admont.<sup>3</sup> There are several biblical and intertestamental references about I.H.B.V.M., but the devotion developed only in the Middle Ages.

It began to appear within the ideals and symbols in Western Europe with St. Anselm (d. 1109), Eadmer (d. 1141), St. Bernard (d. 1153), and Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1140). The devotion flourished as a private religious practice. It was later developed and advocated by St. Mathilda of Hackeborn (1241-1298), St. Gertrude the Great (1252-1302), and St. Brigid of Sweden (1303-1373).<sup>4</sup> It was only St. Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444) who promoted and spread the devotion. He was also called as the "Doctor of the Heart of Mary."<sup>5</sup> The devotion

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<sup>1</sup> The writer is a seminarian in the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (a.k.a., The Eudist Fathers) from Karachi-Pakistan. He holds *B.Phil.*, from Pontifical University *Urbaniana*, Rome and *B. Theo.*, from MCD University of Divinity, Australia. Currently, he is writing a thesis for STL (*Sacrae Theologiae Licentiatius*) degree at Loyola School of Theology: Ateneo de Manila-Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief review on Church's teaching and liturgical celebration, See, "The Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary," *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Vol. 1: Sacramentary. New York: Catholic Book, 1992: 216-218.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief survey, See, Michael O'Carroll, "Heart of Mary, The," In *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc.: 1982): 166-168.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief survey, See, A. Rum, "Immaculate Heart of Mary," In *Dictionary of Mary* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Pub.,1997): 194-197.

<sup>5</sup> See, Roten, Johan G. "The Heart of Mary." *Marian Library: University of Dayton* (June 4, 2013).

became more popular and common only from the 17<sup>th</sup> century through the writings of St. John Eudes (1601-1680). He founded the Society of the Admirable Heart of Mary.<sup>6</sup> Pius XI called John Eudes the “Father, the Doctor, and the Apostle of liturgical devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.” St. Antony Mary Claret (1807- 1870) founded a congregation and called it the slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Pope Francis on 13th October 2013, entrusted the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He referred to Our Lady of Famita.

## St. John Eudes

### Biographical Sketch

John Eudes was born on 14 November 1601 at Ri in Normandy-France. He regards his birth as a special grace of God through the maternal intercession of Mary. His father Isaac Eudes and mother Martha Corbin were Catholics. John Eudes moved to Caen for studies and later received the clerical tonsure and minor orders in September 1620. He began his theological studies in Caen and moved to Paris. There he entered into French Oratory, founded by Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle who was named by Pope Urban VIII, “the apostle of the Incarnate Word.”<sup>7</sup> John Eudes was ordained a priest on 20 December 1625 and celebrated his first Mass on Christmas day. Fr. Eudes undertook no less than 117 missions. He was heard in cities, big and small, and in the country by bishops, priests, religious, king, queen, lords and the huge number of faithful. His preaching was rooted in the Word of God, which was a fruit of his personal prayer and contemplation. In 1641, he founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in Caen who provided care for marginalied women. After two years, in 1643 he went out from the Oratory and founded the Congregation of Jesus and Mary for priests. Once he wrote them that:

*We are the missionaries of divine mercy, sent by the Father of mercy to distribute the treasures of His mercy that is to sinners; to touch them in a spirit of mercy, compassion and kindness.*<sup>8</sup>

He died on 19 August 1680. He was beatified by Pius X on 25 April 1909 and canonized by Pius XI on 31 May 1925. Pope Pius X in the Decree of Beatification (December 13, 1908) said:

*His services to the Church received a vast increase when, burning with a singular love for the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, he was the first to think, not without some divine inspiration, of offering to them liturgical worship. Of this sweet devotion of piety, therefore, he is to be considered the Father, since, from the beginning of his congregation of priests, he provided that the feasts of those Sacred Hearts should be*

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<sup>6</sup> Monica & Bill Dodds, “Admirable Heart of Mary, The” in *Encyclopedia of Mary* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitors, Inc., 2007): 11-12. See also, “Immaculate Heart of Mary” in the same source: 136-137.

<sup>7</sup> See, Raymond Deville, *The French School of Spirituality: An Introduction and Reader* . translated by Agnes Cunningham (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 37.

<sup>8</sup> John Eudes, *Complete Works*, vol. 10, 399.

*celebrated among them; the Doctor also, for he composed special offices and Masses in their honor; and finally the Apostle, for he strove, with all his might, to spread everywhere this salutary devotion.*

### Contribution

Since 1841, Fr. Eudes was working on the liturgical text for the Mass and Divine Office for the feast in honor of the I.H.B.V.M. Every year on 20 October, Fr. Eudes privately celebrated the Mass in honor of I.H.B.V.M within the Congregation. It is the fruit of his writings and through hard work that for the first time publicly the feast was celebrated on 08 February 1648. The hymns and the sequence of the Mass all had been written by Fr. Eudes.<sup>9</sup> The devotion was much fostered and explained by him in a book, called *The Admirable Heart of Mary*.<sup>10</sup> He explains the theological basis for the feast in Mary's relationship with the Blessed Trinity:

*The Father establishes the Kingdom of His love in the Heart of Mary, the Son prepares His dwelling place in it, and the Holy Spirit, the fullness of Love itself, makes there His temple.*<sup>11</sup>

For John Eudes the Heart of Mary is *the holiest and most intimate union that ever was and will be, next to the hypostatic union...of this single Heart, the Holy Spirit has said twice: Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.*<sup>12</sup> The liturgical celebration of the I.H.B.V.M is a way of honoring and praising the Lord for the gift of the Heart of Mary: the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. The celebration of this feast is a call for each Christian to have a heart like Mary in order to follow the Will of the Father. St. John Eudes says:

*In honouring the Heart of Mary, we desire to honour not some mystery, action of quality, nor even only the most worthy person of the virgin, but the source and origin of the dignity and sanctity of all that, i.e. her love and her charity.*<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the Mass celebrated by St. John Eudes on 8 February 1648 has opened a new way to understand the mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a brief review on the life of St. John Eudes, See, Alvaro Torres, *St. Jean Eudes: A Priest according to the Heart of God*. Translated by Lizanne Marrsh. 1-30.

<sup>10</sup> John Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*. Translated from the French by Charles di Targiani and Ruth Hauser. New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1948. "Immaculate Heart of Mary"

<sup>11</sup> Torres, *St. Jean Eudes: A Priest according to the Heart of God*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> John Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, 10-12.

<sup>13</sup> John Eudes, *Complete Works*, vol. VI., 148.

<sup>14</sup> For recent understanding and liturgical celebration, See, Luc Crepy and Marie-Françoise Le Brizaut, "The Liturgical Celebration of the Heart of Mary," in *Saint John Eudes: Missionary—Priest (1601—1680), Worker for the new evangelization in the XVII century*. Translated from French by Anne Josephine Carr and edited by Mary James Wilson (Quezon City: Claretian Communication Foundations, 2016), 101-106.