

# MIRRORS OF LOVE

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It all began when Ven. Maria Celeste Crostarosa received a revelation while she was still a novice to, “Stamp on your spirit the features of his life and the resemblance of him that comes from imitation. Be on earth living and inspired portraits of my beloved Son. Carry him about as the life of your heart and as the goal of your existence and as the Master of your spirit.” With regard to the **Intent of the Father** she wrote: “This instruction was for her soul like a polished mirror into which, she remained gazing continually at the dazzling light of the sun (Son) and found herself at once drawn into the divine splendor of her Well-Beloved.” (**Autobiography**) Celeste, and the Order which she was to found, was called from the beginning to be for the world a Mirror of God’s Love.

Likewise, we are called to fix our gaze on the Son and, as if gazing in a mirror, see not only the splendor of His Being but in our own being a living reflection of God’s eternal love. “It is in this that the Redeemer is able today to accomplish His work of salvation in us and through us.” Const. 5 For, “The more we strive to live the love of Christ, the more the thoughts and feelings of Christ will fill our spirit and our heart, the more we will become His faithful images.” **Constitution 6**

Like a double exposure of a photograph, one superimposed on the other, we endeavor to be Christ to one another: “To be a living copy and faithful portrait of Jesus so that he might find himself in you, and you recognize yourself in him, your God, through faith.” **Florilegium 6 - Spiritual Exercises for December**

Jesus continued to instruct Celeste with these words, “In my wisdom, goodness, and infinity I call you, dear soul, because I want you to be clothed with all the virtues that make me beautiful, thus you will be the image of me and I shall live a life of love in the world by dwelling in your heart.” **Florilegium 4 - Colloquies, III, 18 (28)**

Ven. Celeste had a creative spirit. Just reading her works gives us insight into the richness of her inner life by the way she uses imagery in her writings. She was also pliable in the hand of God by opening her heart and allowing God to shape and mold her, transform her into the image of the Son.

This brought to my mind a wise saying by an anonymous author: “It is not you that shapes God. It is God that shapes you. If then you are the work of God, await the hand of the Artist who does all things in due season. Offer God your heart, soft and tractable, and keep the form in which the Artist has fashioned you. Let your clay be moist lest you grow hard and lose the imprint of God’s fingers.”

Today, you are gathered to reflect on your commitment to become Christ’s perfect image. A tall order! Nevertheless, that is why you make your commitment so you can remain moist so that the Hand of the Artist can continually form your heart in every season into the image of Christ. And this transformation into the image of Christ is a life-long process. How is this done?

Jesus said to Celeste then, and says to us now, “Enter into my divine heart and live there every day of your life so as to be able to achieve a true imitation of me in love and in activity through a new life witnessed by the whole world, because you are, from among many others, my only and dearly beloved.” **Florilegium 5 - Colloquies, III, 23 (35)**

How can we achieve this entering into Jesus’ divine heart? By entering into our own hearts in quiet prayer and taking time each day to commune with the Beloved. Only through prayer do we come to know in ourselves the love God has for us in Christ. Occasionally, when I am beginning a retreat or feeling down, I pick up my Chotki, Eastern orthodox prayer knots, or a rosary, and inhale the Breath of Life hearing the Word of God say to me, “**You** are my beloved.” And on the exhale I let it deepen in my heart. There are fifty knots on this circle of prayer. If you wanted to go around again, you could reverse the prayer and inhale the name of Jesus and on the exhale say to **him**, “You are **my** Beloved.”

From this kind of prayer flows openness of heart and the strength “to live the love of Christ, (and) be true witnesses of the love of Him who is our beginning and our End, our Way and our Life.” **Constitution 5**

The Beloved told Celeste, “My Spirit which rests in the just soul, as on its own throne, is never quiet. Since your soul is an image of my substance, what then are you in your spirit, in your being, if not a living image, a living reprint of me, yet dependent on my Being?”

**Florilegium 86 - Colloquies VI, 47 (63)** Jesus' breath is our breath. God is as close to us as the air flowing in and out of our lungs. We are dependent on God and God is never quiet in reaching out to all humankind through us. We are the hands, the feet, the words, the prayer of Jesus.

On September 14<sup>th</sup> we celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. The Entrance Antiphon we pray at Mass that day sums up the whole reason for the feast: "We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom is our salvation, our life and resurrection, through which we are saved."

This day is an important feast for Redemptoristines because the fourteenth is also the anniversary of the Ven. Maria Celeste Crostarosa's death in 1755. All her life Celeste made of "her will an echo of Christ's will," **Florilegium 64 - Colloquies II, 7 (11)** and lived united with him on the cross due to the many trials she endured throughout her life. She willingly did this because she experienced "also in glory at the same time by reason of her participation, the joy and union of the Divine Work." **Florilegium 129 - Degrees of Prayer XI, 90 (36)** Therefore, it was apropos that she should die on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and be united with her Beloved in heaven as she was on earth.

Jesus invited his disciples, Celeste, and us, with these words, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross each day and follow me." **(Luke 9:23)** Celeste's response was, "Oh with what love I embraced the cross, loved it, desired it and took pleasure in it -- all for your love." She continues, "Likewise those who love bind themselves to the cross...savor the true and solid sweetness of God and the true peace found therein." **Florilegium 118 - Rules Love of the Cross, 9r-9v (188-189)**

Yesterday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Ven. Celeste extolled "the divine resemblance of Jesus in Mary," in these words, "Stamped by sacred and divine love on her heart Jesus wished to remain over her heart like a seal imprinted on her will... in a way that the will of Mary became so faithful a resemblance of the divine that a genuine portrait of the Divinity seemed to be carved on the heart of Mary..." **Florilegium 12 - Exercise of love for every day, 31 December.**

Celeste bore witness to this in these words, "Yes, my Lady, You are a true image of the Original, a Portrait of Jesus. O my Mother, you are a pure crystal which sparkles most clearly." **Florilegium 11 - Exercise of love for every day, 30 December** "This is what I see in myself, and therefore I have recourse to you, Mother of Love, so that through your intercession the LIVE IMAGE OF JESUS might be engraved on me so that my heavenly Father might look on me with the same infinite love with which he contemplates, in himself, his beloved and divine Son; with the same love may he love us who are in the image of his Humanity. We pray that this be granted to us." **Florilegium 12 - Exercise of love for every day, 31 December.**

Celeste describes Jesus, the only Begotten Son of the Father, as the Sun, reflecting the Father ... as the mirror of the Father. She invites us to look into this mirror of the Son saying, "Those who are pure of heart know My Father because they look upon Him fixedly with a gaze of love." and adds: "They are children of the light because with the vision of right intention, they gaze into the mirror of the divine perfections of their God." **'The Mystic Who Remembered' by Joseph Optiz, CSSR**

This is the call to transformation, to be imprinted by God's fingers with the divine perfections of Jesus. Thus, with our gaze fixed on the Son we reflect as in a mirror Jesus to the world. We are called to be the hands, feet, voice and prayer of the Beloved for the life of the world. We are mirrors of God's love.

I will end this reflection with liturgical dance. I performed this dance at my solemn profession in 1994. It is called the Prayer of Commitment. The words are very fitting for our gathering today. The words are:

*Lord Jesus, I give you my hands to do your work.  
I give you my feet to go your way.  
I give you my tongue to speak your words.  
I give you my mind that you may think in me.  
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me.  
Above all, I give you my heart that you may love in me your people,  
all humankind.  
And I give you my whole self that you may grow in me;  
So it is you, Lord Jesus, who live and work and pray in me.*

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Note: After the liturgical dance a mirror was given to each Associate with the words, 'You are an image of Jesus.' On the mirror side the name of Jesus was written and on the back a quote from Celeste, *"I no longer saw myself, but I saw You in my very self and myself transformed into You, my Most Pure Love."*

Questions:

How am I a 'Mirror of Love' witnessing to the world God's love?

In times of trials /crosses do I ever experience joy and union with Christ, the sweetness of God and inner peace?

How is the Blessed Virgin Mary an image of Jesus? How can I be transformed into the likeness of her Son?