

Institute for Mission
Exploring a
Lived Spirituality

2nd March 2021



*“You have made us for yourself
O Lord and our hearts
are restless
until they rest in you”*

St. Augustine

The Following Questions will Guide our Exploration of this introductory session

1. How can we nurture our spirit in a way that will open our hearts to the Divine One dwelling in us?
2. How does our spirituality help and enable us to open our hearts in a personal relationship with God?
3. What does it mean to “begin with the heart?”
4. How do we transform our hearts?

*“In the quiet intimacy of our heart,
the beloved Christ dwells
within the Trinity”*



*“Make your home in me as I make
mine in you”*

Seeking a shared understanding of the meaning of the heart in the context of scripture, theology and spirituality

The Heart

It is difficult to find language for the wonder of the mystery of ourselves in God.

Heart is the term that we will be using as we explore our inner life in God.

In theological terms the heart is often understood as the sacred spaciousness within us that is;

the dwelling place of God.

Our heart can behold the presence of God within ourselves, each other and creation.

The heart is commonly reached not through reason but through the imagination,

In biblical terms the **heart** is understood as the centre not only of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life.

In the book of Deuteronomy chapter 6, heart and soul are used interchangeably.

“Listen Israel, our God is one. You shall love the Lord your God withal your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let these words I urge on you today be written on your”
(Deut 6: 5-6)

The **heart** holds the divine spark or **spirit** (ruah).

From The Catholic Catechism of the Church

“According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays.... The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or biblical expression, the heart is the place ‘to which I withdraw.’

The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully.

The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, it is the place of covenant (CCC, 2562–63)”

Engaging the whole heart in our love for God is not something that happens from one moment to the next; it is a process.

To love God with all your heart means intentionally and gradually making your relationship with God the central treasure of your life.



The Hebrew and Christian scriptures refer to “the heart” as the root or the anchor of all personal life.



The biblical understanding implies that the heart is the place that carries;

- **Wisdom,**
- **Courage**
- **Creativity**



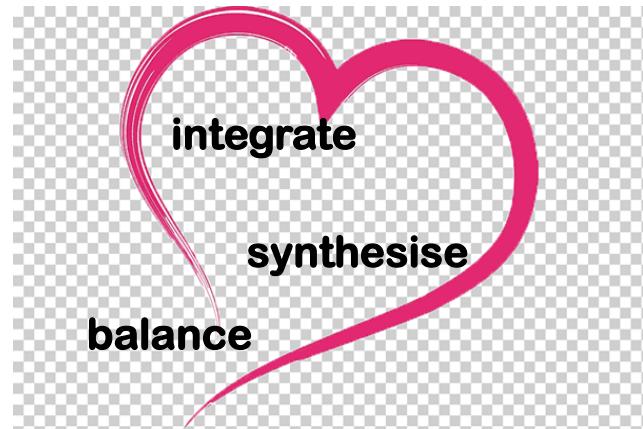
The work of the heart is to;

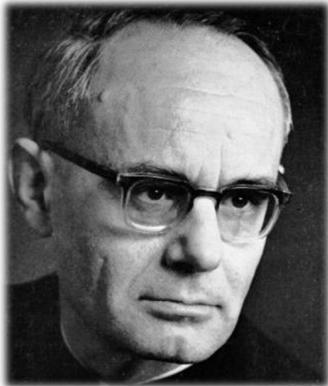
integrate, balance and synthesise;

the disparate, the separate capacities

of the human person located in the;

will, reason and emotions





According to **Karl Rahner**, one of the prominent theologians of the 20th Century, **Heart** is a primal word in the sense that it does not derive from some other word.

It does not denote the physiological heart muscle as such, but rather the original centre of the “physical—spiritual” person before any differentiation into body and soul.

Karl Rahner
1904-1984

This centre of the person is in its essence open to other persons and to God.

Prominent medieval Christian writers like;

❖ Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

❖ William St. Thierry (1075-1148)

❖ Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

❖ Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167)

❖ Bonaventure (1221-1274)



all understood the heart as the locus for personal life and union with God through love.

This is evident in their pastoral texts which expressed a contemplative response to the experience of God.

The biblical idea of the heart as the spiritual centre of the human person was a common theme throughout middle ages.



St. Bonaventure
1221-1274

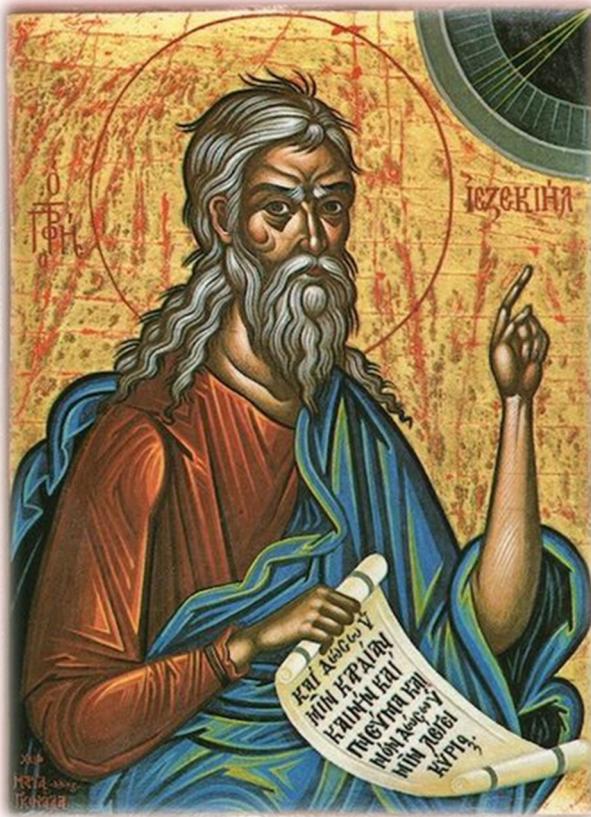
The Franciscan saint and mystic, Bonaventure uses the word “heart” throughout his book:

The Soul’s Journey to God.

Bonaventure sees the heart as the **seat of intelligence and love** with a special emphasis on the affective aspect.

He emphasizes that the journey to God is not an intellectual exercise; it is not a “head trip” but a matter of the heart.

To begin the journey to God we must desire God and to truly desire God one must “apply the heart”



The prophet Ezekiel (36:27) spoke of our transformation in God as receiving the gift of a new heart.

***“I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you,
taking from your bodies your stony hearts
and giving you natural hearts”***
(36:27)

Ezekiel, a priest and prophet living in exile in the city of Babylon between 593 and 571 BC.

For Reflection and Prayer

Towards Transformation of the Heart



**Hold the stone in one hand and the “heart of flesh” in the other hand
Sense the difference in feelings**

Which one seems to be more part of you?
How would you describe the difference in feeling?
Can you relate these descriptions to your own inner feelings?

If a feeling like stone, surfaces in you; don't judge or reject this feeling.
Hold it tenderly as in the image, put more love around it.
Ask for help from God to do this – eventually the hardness will melt into a **“heart of flesh.”**

Heart Awakening and Expanding

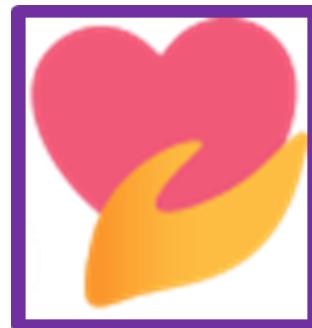
The heart does not grow through stages in the way that we often speak of the mind growing through the stages from concrete to highly developed abstract thinking

We know that loving “expands” the heart

Someone who shows the quality and capacity of the heart through compassion, forgiveness and generosity, we say has a **big** heart.

The response of the Abdullah and Segar families to the tragic loss of their children is a deep heart response

They have committed themselves to transforming their personal pain through forgiveness



i4Give Day

When we talk about **Beginning with the Heart** we are not talking about the heart as a place of a passing sentiment or an emotion. Instead we are talking about the heart as the place within us that carries with it a sort of;

The English Cardinal and prominent theologian, John Henry Newman (1801-1890) said;

“there is a kind of knowing that excites the heart which is commonly reached not through reason but through the imagination.”

It is the ordinary that contains the mystery.
The mystery is not as we tend to believe,
in the extraordinary!



The reflective person is one who interrogates his or her own heart.

The Examen, a spiritual practice initiated by St. Ignatius of Loyola is one good, reflective practice which interrogates the heart.

The Examen - a good, reflective practice which interrogates the heart.

Key Phases of the Examen

1. **Gratitude**: Giving thanks for what has been awakened in us this day.
2. **Identifying and Naming**: that which is blocking the stream of God's grace and love, preventing it from flowing freely in my heart
3. **Hope**: Moving forward into a future graced by our loving and faithful God.

An important outcome of “interrogating the heart” through living reflectively, is the awakening of wisdom; the divine imprint in each of us



The person of Wisdom is revealed to us in the book of Proverbs as the One who came forth from God and as God's playmate, co-created with the Divine.

“Wisdom was born before there were oceans, or springs overflowing with water, before the hills were there, before the mountains were put in place..... When God established the heavens, I was there..... When the earth’s foundations were made, I was there. I was like a child by God’s side, enjoying the presence of the Divine One. I delighted every day, rejoicing in God’s inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”
(Proverbs 8:22).

Wisdom is active in our world

“building her home and setting the table,” (Prov. 9:1)
“singing her song at the city gates,” (Prov. 8:3)
“crying aloud in the streets and the market place.” (Prov.1;20)

“For where your treasure is there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34; Matthew 6:21)

The treasure is hidden in the field of our lives. Our call is to discover this treasure through the lifelong process of;

AWAKENING

And

TRANSFORMATION



Awakening to the desires and longings of our hearts

“Already within us, we carry the fresh wells we thirst for and the beckoning horizons for which we long” (Daniel O’Leary)

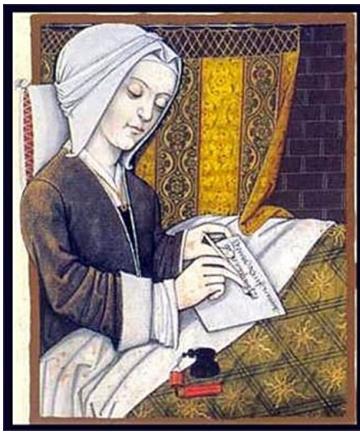
Recall the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-31). In this meeting Jesus revealed to her the capacity of her heart.

He described this as being like a “spring of living water welling up from within her that will never run dry”



Theresa of Avila writes in the Interior Castle....

“the heavenly water begins to rise from the spring that is deep within our heart. It swells and expands our whole interior being producing deep blessings”



How Wonderful is My Soul (My Heart)
Composed by Brige O'Hare OSC
Based on the writings of Mechtild of Magdeburg)
(1207-1282)

1. How wonderful is my soul (heart)
 Which you my God have created.
 Nothing can truly show its beauty
 Nothing can truly set me free

Except your love flowing through my being
 Speaking to me of things unknown.
 And in your love flowing through my being
 My soul awakens to you, Holy One

2. And the joy of this awakening
 Just cannot be described.
 Nothing can truly tell its wonder
 Nothing can ever give such peace

Except your love flowing through my being
 Speaking to me of things unknown.
 And in your love flowing through my being
 My soul awakens to you, Holy One
 Holy One....

Holy One.....

Holy One.....



