

## **Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus June 03, 2016**

The readings: Ezek. 34:11-6; Rom. 5:5-11; Luke 15:3-7

Today we celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a devotion which essentially consists of worship and expression of love to the Person of Christ. The Christian faith is a response to Christ as a living, loving person, not just embracing a set of principles. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not a peripheral devotion, but it is to honour and love God which is the heart of our faith and is centred on the heart of Jesus as the emblem of Divine love. The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is deeply rooted in the life of Christian people and is practiced in the universal Church. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is devotion to Jesus Christ Himself, but in the particular ways of meditating on his interior life and on His threefold love: His divine love, His burning love that fed His human will and His sensible love that affects His interior life. For all Catholic men and women, families and young people troubled by the many afflictions of modern life, this devotion has been a great source of consolation. At the centre of the feast is the heart of Jesus, full of love for the world. According to the Gospel of Saint John, when Jesus died on the Cross, a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear. One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. An ancient tradition sees in the water and the blood that came from the wounded side of the crucified Jesus, the Church was born.

June is the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart and the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is centered on the heart of Jesus as the emblem of Divine love. This Feast has been a Solemnity in the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar since 1856, and is celebrated 19 days after Pentecost. Even though there has been the devotion to the sacred Heart from the early days of the church we have from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the first unmistakable indications of devotions to the Sacred Heart in the Benedictine or Cistercian monasteries. The most significant source for the devotion to the Sacred Heart is from the revelation to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), who claimed to have received visions of Jesus Christ. The revelations were numerous, and the church has accepted these to be real and deeply spiritual. In one of the apparitions, Jesus allowed Margaret Mary to rest her head upon His Heart during which time He revealed to her the wonders of His love, telling her that He desired to make them known to all mankind and to diffuse the treasures of His goodness, and that He had chosen her for this work. It was on June 11, 1899 Pope Leo XIII solemnly consecrated the whole mankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In 1928 Pope Pius XI approved the devotion to the Sacred Heart.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart began on Calvary when the Heart of Christ was pierced on the Cross; it opened the door to realizing how deeply Jesus loves us. In return, he wants nothing other than our total love. God wants us to love him without reserve. This is what devotion to the Sacred Heart is all about. Christ, in his appearances to Margaret Mary, has promised many blessings to those who practice devotion to his Sacred Heart. Accordingly Jesus promises all the graces necessary for their state of life; peace in their families; consolation in all their troubles; their refuge in

life and especially in death; abundantly bless all their undertakings; he will be infinite ocean of mercy. He promised to bless those places wherein the image of the Sacred Heart will be exposed and venerated and will give to priests the power to touch the most hardened hearts. Finally the promise that his all powerful love will grant to all those who will receive Communion on the First Fridays, for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance: they will not die without receiving the sacraments; and the Sacred Heart will be their secure refuge in that last hour.

We have the own words of Jesus for the fact that our Lord's love for us is a sweet yoke and a light burden for us to carry. In our better moments, especially when we succeed in putting into practice some particular act requiring self-denial in the interest of service to another or in resisting temptation against God's law, we experience the joy that does indeed make the yoke sweet. But we do not have to live too long before we find that fidelity to God can weigh heavily upon us. At times it seems impossible to practice forgiveness from the heart, especially when we feel betrayed by one we have trusted. The burden can feel very heavy when we are subjected day after day to petty annoyances, insensitivity, lack of appreciation. It requires no great exercise of imagination to draw up a lengthy list of situations in which we feel anything but the lightness and sweetness of love as we strive to implement the Lord's commandments. For us Christians the word "Sacred Heart of Jesus" symbolizes the divine love of Jesus. Today's readings explain the meaning of Divine love. These readings explain to us of a love that flows from God towards us, through our spiritual growth by the sanctifying power and grace of the Holy Spirit. In our First Reading from the Book of Ezekiel, we heard the Lord God telling us that he himself will search for his sheep, just as shepherds seek out their flocks from among scattered sheep. He will rescue them from all places and will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land. This indicates God's personal commitment to bring His salvation to mankind and to establish His spiritual Kingdom. He further says that he will feed them with good pasture and they shall feed on rich pasture and he himself will be the shepherd of his sheep, and will make them lie down under his loving care. These Words are repeated in Psalm 23, where the Lord says: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters."

The Second Reading of today tells us that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Secondly, Christ died for the ungodly. He died for us who are ungodly sinners, always fulfilling what is holy and praiseworthy for the glory of God. Thirdly, while, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, to prove His love for us, while we still were sinners, Christ died for us. Fourthly, having been justified by the Blood of Christ, we will obtain our salvation, our adoption as children of God and eternal life in the Kingdom of God. To be justified means, 'The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us 'the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Finally, having been reconciled to God through the death of Jesus, much more surely will we be saved by His life because we were reconciled in and through him.

The Gospel Reading of today places before us the Parable of the Lost Sheep. This parable shows the Divine love of the Good Shepherd towards his sheep and he goes in search of the lost one. The difference between the Gospel of Luke and the First Reading is that in the Gospel, emphasis is placed on the personal and searching love of God for each and every one of us. The Divine love of the Good Shepherd is infinite love and far reaching love that does not want any one person to be lost. Thus prophet Ezekiel says: "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone." God seeks out those who are lost, shining His healing grace on them, in the hope of returning them to the pasture, Jesus himself. The words of Jesus in the Gospel about God's love and care for us must be the most comforting and reassuring ever spoken on this earth. God reveals His love, not to the learned or the sophisticated - but to those who are humble enough to listen. God reveals His love to people simple and ordinary as we see in the Gospels. Through the Good Shepherd, we perceive the love of God for each and every one of us, especially those who shipwreck in their faith. Through the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we perceive that the love of Jesus is Divine love. Jesus is God! And His love for us can be no less than Divine love that shines forth from His Sacred Heart.

Further, today's Gospel contains Jesus' wonderful invitation: "Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest". Jesus never forces; rather he gently invites. He says: Come! Come especially if you are burdened - whether it's by sickness, sadness, grief, guilt, disappointment, pain, fear, depression, despair. Come! And I will give you rest. That's His promise. Learn from me, says Jesus to us. Let us learn humility from Jesus who is gentle and humble thus will find rest for our souls. Peace of souls is the ultimate prize - the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding - that's what matters. Everyone who is sick wants to be cured. Therefore we have the ready promise of Jesus of perfect rest if we come to him.

The love of God may well be a choice by God who is utterly free and not bound in any way, but it remains a love for those who are unworthy. It is a searching love. There is an absurdity about it. There is no way of possibly explaining the absurdity of the figure of Christ upon the cross because the explanation is found in an equally absurd love. From this foolishness of God came our salvation. Jesus breathed forth the Spirit as he died upon the cross. From his wounded side flowed the life giving waters of baptism and the precious blood of the Eucharist. In giving up his life he gave it up not just for us, but to us. We are so used to baptism and Eucharist that we forget that they issued forth from his broken body and his pierced heart. We are so used to our life in the Spirit that we forget that it is only the one who died who breathed forth his Spirit for all of us. After his death he rose and returned to the Father, and then with the Father sent the Spirit to us so that all of the love which led to his birth and to his death would finally reach our hearts.

We are reminded today that, in the "Sacred Heart" is revealed the mystery of the Divine Mind of Jesus as God. The Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus affirms Jesus was God-man, is one of the Three Divine Presences of the Holy Trinity. While the symbolic picture of the human heart echoes a Heart of Flesh of the human nature, the "Divine Mind" that is synonym to "Sacred Heart," echoes the Divine nature. As the Holy Catholic

Church teaches, in Christ, God manifested as man, the Divine nature cannot be separated from the human nature. Today, let us express our love to this sacred Heart to whom are families are consecrated and place our total trust in him and run to him in our problems and need. This sacred heart which is burning with love for us will protect us and care for us and give us the peace and tranquillity.

Christ, in his appearances to Margaret Mary, has promised many blessings to those who practice devotion to his Sacred Heart. Accordingly Jesus promises all the graces necessary for their state of life; peace in their families; consolation in all their troubles; their refuge in life and especially in death; abundantly bless all their undertakings; he will be infinite ocean of mercy. He promised to bless those places wherein the image of the Sacred Heart will be exposed and venerated and will give to priests the power to touch the most hardened hearts. Finally the promise that his all-powerful love will grant to all those who will receive Communion on the First Fridays, for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance: they will not die without receiving the sacraments; and the Sacred Heart will be their secure refuge in that last hour.

But all of this we can say in summary that we are of the religion of love, the religion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Because all of these characteristics we find in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. There, we can see His sufferings, His Cross, His humility, His forgiveness, His victory in the Resurrection, His infinite Love for us. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the summary, the condensation of the Gospel. Because of that, Jesus said: "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart." All Christian teaching we can find in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Let's hear the Sermon of the Mount from the Sacred Heart of Jesus: blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, the clean of heart, they who suffer persecution. Behold the Sacred Heart of Jesus, meek, merciful, innocent, and suffering patiently all the persecutions, the example of all these beatitudes. But the most important demonstration of the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the Holy Eucharist. "Jesus . . . having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is the companion of our exile, by His real presence: "Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened and I will refresh you." He is for us the God of consolation.

When reflecting on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus we are reminded of the model life of St. Maximilian Kolbe, who was canonized in October, 1982. Born in Poland in 1894, when he was old enough to answer God's calling, Maximilian joined the religious congregation of the Franciscans. By 1927, he had founded a house for those who wished to enter the religious life. In 1941, while appointed as the superior of the Polish community, he was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned at Auschwitz. Twelve weeks after his arrival at the prison camp, a prisoner escaped. In retaliation, ten men were chosen at random to die of starvation. One of the chosen men was a young father. Shining in the love of Jesus, Father Maximilian offered to take the place of the young man. The offer was accepted and on August 14, 1941, Fr. Maximilian died of starvation after suffering with nine others in the prison. In this act of self-sacrifice, we perceive true Christian love. Here, one man gave his life for another on the Day of Judgment, when the young father was condemned to death. Those who obeyed the commandments of

God as Father Maximilian obeyed them; they have come to know God. In them, the love of God has reached perfection. By embracing the same obedience to the Commandments in the love of Jesus Christ, we know that we are in Jesus and that Jesus is in us.

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