

Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus June 12, 2015

The readings: Hos. 11:1-4, 8-9; Eph. 3:8-19; Jn. 19:31-7

Today we celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a devotion which is essentially worship and a response 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. In his vision to St Margaret Mary Jesus expressed his desire of being loved by humankind and on each one he would bestow his immense treasures of love, of mercy, of grace, of sanctification and salvation. He promised that wherever this image should be exposed with a view to showing it special honour, he would pour forth his blessings and graces. 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.

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. The feast became a celebration in the universal Church in the nineteenth century. 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.

For us Christians the word "Sacred Heart of Jesus" symbolizes the divine love of Jesus. Today's readings explain the meaning of Divine love. They 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. 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 foolish 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 and from his wounded side flowed forth 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.

The first reading, from the eleventh chapter of the Book of Hosea, is a particularly moving reading. In it God through the prophet describes his deep personal love for Israel. He says that when Israel was a child, he loved him, and out of Egypt he called his son. The chapter describes the love of the Father for his son and the refusal of the son to reciprocate his love. The love of the Father for the son does not permit him to abandon him. "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?" Admah and Zeboiim were towns that were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah. These towns were completely overturned when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. The term "overturn" refers to complete destruction as described in the book of Genesis. The towns were turned upside down and nothing remained of them. Because of God's love, he is unable to do this with his people. He tells them that his heart has overturned within him and his compassion has grown warm and tender for them. Instead of overturning his people, God overturns his heart. Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical about love that he published at the beginning of his papacy, commented these verses saying: "God's passionate love for his people - for humanity - is at the same time a forgiving love. It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice. Here Christians can see a dim prefiguration of the mystery of the Cross: so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love."

In the second reading, from the Letter to the Ephesians Saint Paul describes the love of Christ in awesome terms: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what are the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God". Here Paul feels privileged and because of the grace of Jesus, he is chosen to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ. He has to make everyone see and understand the purpose of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who is the creator of all things. Now through the instrument of the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This is what God planned from the beginning of times and carried it in Jesus that through our faith in him we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. For this reason Paul says, he bows his knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. Secondly, his prayer is that God strengthen their inner self with power of his Spirit, and that through their faith and depth of love Christ may remain with them always. Thus in the early Church, the love of God and the love of Christ were not expressed in a specialized way, since the focus was on the person of Christ who dwelt in their hearts rather than on his attributes.

The Gospel of today tells us about the death of Jesus and that his side was pierced with a spear leading to the flow of the last drop of blood and water. John the beloved disciple of Jesus was close to him along with Mary the Mother of Jesus and a few women followers. A trial was made whether Jesus was dead. He died in less time than persons crucified commonly did. It showed that he had laid down his life of himself. The spear broke up the very fountains of life; no human body could survive such a wound. But its being so solemnly attested, shows there was something peculiar in it. The blood and water that flowed out signified those two great benefits which all believers partake of through Christ, justification and sanctification; blood for atonement, water for purification. They both flow from the pierced side of our Redeemer. To Christ crucified we owe merit for our justification, and

Spirit and grace for our sanctification. Same water and blood out of Jesus' pierced side, continues to purify us. The Scripture was fulfilled that his bones were not broken explains the significance of Jesus' death on the cross. He turns his attention to the fact of His sacrifice on the cross. According to the Hebrew law the sacrificial lamb needed to be perfect and unblemished, with no broken bones. Christ was unblemished and his side was pierced as he remained a perfect sacrifice to the Father.

Today, the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is centred on the heart of Jesus as the emblem of Divine love. By this characteristic, the devotion to the Sacred Heart is naturally defined. Divine love is the highest of three levels of loves; Divine love, spiritual love and physical love. We are reminded on this feast day 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.

While inaugurating the year for Priest on the 19th of June 2009, Pope Benedict XVI said that the heart of God burns with compassion. In the solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus the Church presents us this mystery for our contemplation: the mystery of the heart of a God who feels compassion and who bestows all his love upon humanity. It is a mysterious love which in the texts of the New Testament is revealed to us as God's boundless and passionate love for mankind. God does not lose heart in the face of ingratitude or rejection by the people he has chosen; rather, with infinite mercy he sends his only-begotten Son into the world to take upon himself the fate of a shattered love, so that by defeating the power of evil and death he could restore to human beings enslaved by sin their dignity as sons and daughters. But this took place at great cost, the only-begotten Son of the Father was sacrificed on the Cross: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end". The symbol of this love which transcends death is his side, pierced by a spear. The Apostle John, an eyewitness, tells us: "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water."

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.”

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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