

The Sacred Heart



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By:

Reverend Robert Nash, S.J.

Cover Art: “Adoration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with Saint Ignatius Loyola and Saint Aloysius Gonzaga” by Jose de Paz (1720 – 1790). The oil on copper painting was completed in 1770. It was part of an exhibition entitled, *The Arts in Latin America, 1492-1820*, held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 2007. The exhibition was organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in collaboration with LACMA and Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City. The original is in the Public Domain. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original one-dimensional work of art.*



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The Sacred Heart

“Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? Or distress? Or famine? Or nakedness? Or danger? Or persecution? Or the sword?

. . . I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord.” (Romans 8:35)

A man walked down the street. He spoke and people found themselves listening, almost in spite of themselves. No one had ever spoken like this and the people wanted to hear more. The man moved out of the town and they followed Him. Whole days passed, but nothing seemed to matter so long as they had Him. They forgot about sleep. They forgot about food. However, the man remembered. He told them sit down and He would feed them. Thousands sat down, but there was no food except five loaves and two fishes. He took the loaves and the fishes and blessed and they multiplied so there was enough to go around with plenty left over.

The man was Jesus Christ. He might just as easily have created the food but His way is to make use of whatever we can supply ourselves.

Wine ran short at a marriage feast. He told the servants to fill six jars with water. It was all they had, and this He took and changed into wine.

What Have You?

With a piece of moistened clay, He anointed the eye of a man born blind. He told him to go to the pool and wash it off. The man did and, at that instant, he received the gift of sight. Ten lepers cried out to Him to have mercy on them. He ordered them to go and show themselves to the priests. While on their way, the hideous scars fell from their bodies.

These instances, chosen at random, show that Our Lord wants to enter into partnership with us. He looks for our co-operation however insignificant it may be. "Do your own share," He seems to say, "and certainly I shall not fail to do Mine. Bring as much as you can and, after that, depend on Me to supply the rest."

Apostle of the Sacred Heart

This was also His principle in dealing with Saint Margaret Mary. Margaret was a shy, timid little girl from the country. He chose her to be the apostle of His Sacred Heart. Margaret's father had died when she was a child. Circumstances forced Margaret and her poor mother to live at the home of three dreadful female relatives, reminiscent of the three witches in Macbeth. Margaret had none of the innocent joys of childhood and soon developed an inferiority complex. She was afraid to leave the house unless she had permission from each of the three dames who ruled over it with an iron rod. For entire days, the unfortunate child would hide herself in a corner of a stable or garden where a few sympathetic neighbors would bring her scraps of food. "When at last I came back," she tells us, "it was with such terror that I felt like a criminal going to receive the death sentence." The evil-minded women sneeringly accused her of misbehaving during these intervals with some lads of the village. The charge drew the most vehement protests from Margaret. So great was her horror of anything that might tarnish her purity that she declared she would prefer to be torn into a thousand pieces than even to think of it.

This much must suffice to indicate the background of the girl of twenty-three who rang the bell one evening, at the Visitation Convent, in Paray, and asked to be accepted as a postulant. The door swung open and she was admitted. She was in an ecstasy of joy at the prospect. On the very threshold of the convent, a violent temptation seized her. She wished to fly back to the mother she loved and be done with the crazy notion of a nunnery. However, she went on. "I was, in fact, so transported with joy that I exclaimed, "It is here that my God would have me to be."

Troubles Begin

Paray would prove to be no paradise. In their accounts, ancient biographers, fearful of shocking their pious readers, were careful to suppress any details that seemed to smack of what was not edifying. Modern writers have reacted against that tendency. Instead, they favor healthy frankness and reality. Scandals come and the story of those scandals can often yield undoubted advantages in the telling.

There were scandals at Paray, but they were not as deep a dye as those found in other monasteries at the time. (Margaret was born in 1647.) However, the little convent had its problems just the same. The fact was that some of the sisters did not have a vocation.

Those grand ladies looked down their noses at the child of a mere notary from some backwater hamlet in Burgundy. They soon made poor Margaret keenly conscious of the inferiority of her position. She began to realize that she had been delivered from the claws of the three witches only to be lashed by the tongues of scorn and ill-concealed contempt of her sisters in religion.

This, then, was the nun, who, in the inscrutable designs of Providence, was chosen to be the apostle of the Sacred Heart, entrusted by Our Lord Himself with the arduous mission to propagate this devotion.

Pope Pius XII wrote, "The foremost place amongst those who promoted this excellent devotion must assuredly go to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. Inspired by her own burning zeal and with the assistance of her spiritual director, Blessed Claude de la Colombiere, she richly embellished this devotion and caused it to take clear and definite shape, much to the admiration of the faithful."

To tell the truth, the prospect scared Margaret. Our Lord appeared to her repeatedly, explaining different things He wanted her to do. On one occasion, she was ordered to tell Mother Superior that God was not pleased with the spirit of the community. The poor girl began to tremble and implored to be excused. However, the Lord was inexorable and Margaret had to go. She tells us that on the way to her Superior's room, she prayed that she might drop dead.

More Troubles

Worse was to come. Margaret was to undertake a big mission, none other than to spread devotion to His Sacred Heart all through the Church. Again, she expostulated and pleaded. Again, her pleading was without effect. She pointed out that she was nobody. With charming naiveté, she reminded Him that several other nuns in the convent were by far more capable to perform that great work. All she wanted to do was to hide herself and give herself to prayer and sacrifice. Why would He not permit this and hand over His commission to someone else?

“It is precisely because you are an abyss of ignorance and of nothingness that I have chosen you. It will thus be clear to all men that the mission is Mine, not yours.”

As He took the water at Cana, as He took the five loaves and two fishes, so would He take Margaret, just as she was, devoid of any outstanding merit or talent, and, using whatever amount of cooperation was possible for her to give, He would Himself provide for what was lacking.

With reluctance, we leave the rest of the fascinating story of Margaret. In her distress, Our Lord promised to send into her life “a priest after His own Heart.” This proved to be the young Jesuit, Father de la Colombiere. He became her staunch friend and support, having first thoroughly tested her spirit. He was convinced she was led by the spirit of God and told Mother Prioress of his conviction.

His verdict caused another flutter in the dovecot where they said Margaret had now succeeded in deceiving even the wily Jesuit! Margaret would have an interview with him lasting a whole hour or longer. The great ladies were graciously bowed out after being accorded only a minute or a minute and a half! We can leave you to surmise the results. This happened almost four hundred years ago.

Pope Pius XII

With what zest the message of the Sacred Heart has since been relayed can be judged from the facts that are listed by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical regarding this devotion. He wrote the following:

“Our predecessor, Clement XIII granted to the Bishops of Poland and to the Archconfraternity of the Sacred Heart at Rome, permission to celebrate the feast liturgically (so as) to renew through this symbol the memory of that divine love by which Our Savior was driven to offer Himself as a victim to atone for the crimes of mankind.”

Clement granted his permission in 1765, eight years after Margaret’s death. (Clement XIII reigned from 1758 to 1769.)

Pope Pius XII then refers to Pius IX who reigned from 1846 to 1878, ninety years later.

“Our predecessor Pius IX, acceding to the prayers of the bishops of France and of practically the entire Catholic world, commanded that the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus be extended to the entire Church and celebrated in every part of it. From that time, devotion to the Sacred Heart, like a river in full flood, sweeping away all obstacles, spread over the entire world.”

On this occasion, Pius IX invited all the faithful to consecrate themselves publicly to the Sacred Heart. However, Leo XIII, who reigned from 1878 to 1903, went further. In an Encyclical on devotion to the Sacred Heart, he compared the Heart of Christ to the Cross Constantine had seen ablaze in the sky, assuring him of victory.

“In the same way do we place all our confidence in this Sacred Heart, asking from It and hoping and awaiting for, our eternal salvation.”

The great Pontiff then solemnly proclaimed that Christ is King of all men, and to His Sacred Heart he consecrated the whole world. This consecration he regarded as the “outstanding act of his pontificate.”

Twenty-five years later Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ the King and ordered the Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart to be renewed yearly throughout the world. Pius XII quoted Pius XI, who said:

“Does not this devotion—which causes an intimate knowledge of Christ Our Lord to grow in us, engenders in our hearts an intense love of Him, and leads us to model ourselves on Him completely—comprise the sum-total of our religion and therefore the rule of perfection itself?”

“Haurietis Aquas”

Then, Pius XII enlarged upon his own consistent efforts to implement the work of the Popes who went before him, saying:

“At the beginning of Our Pontificate we noted with pleasure that the devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus had made great advances and was continuing to make triumphant progress. Throughout the years of Our Pontificate—years full of trials and cares, but full, too, of sublime consolations—these blessings have not grown less; rather have they become more abundant, richer, and more splendid than before.

“Various projects conducive to fostering this devotion and most suited to the needs of our times have happily arisen. These include associations for cultural development and for the promotion of religion and charitable works; published works treating of this devotion from the historical, mystical, or ascetical viewpoints; pious works of atonement and, in particular, the extremely fervent expressions of piety which are the fruit of the Sodality of the Apostleship of Prayer, under whose aegis, principally, families, colleges, institutions, and at times even whole nations, have been consecrated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

The august writer, viewing this happy development, considered that the time was ripe for a new encyclical that, while warmly encouraging the devotion,

would, at the same time, clarify it and ward off possible misconceptions concerning it. With this in mind, he wrote "*Haurietis Aquas.*" The words are from Isaias. "You shall draw waters with joy out of the fountains of the Savior." These fountains well up in the Sacred Heart and the saintly Pope, who had drunk of them so deeply, is a sure guide to lead us to assuage our thirst at the same inexhaustible source.

The Heart of Christ, he points out, like every other member of Christ's Body, "is entitled to that same cult of adoration with which the Church venerates the Person of the Incarnate Son of God. Moreover, in every language *heart* and *love* are synonymous. The heart is, of its very nature, the symbol and sign of love. Thus, it is particularly well fitted to express the love of Jesus for us and the love that moves us to love Him in return. Indeed, as He shows at great length, the kernel of the devotion consists precisely in an interchange of love. This was graphically illustrated in the revelations made to Saint Margaret Mary.

A Digression

The remainder of this pamphlet will be, for the most part, an effort to comment on the teaching of the late Holy Father, as found in this letter. First, may we be permitted a digression? It is by way of illustrating in a specific instance, the zeal of a fervent Catholic in promoting devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Father Aloysius Kemper was a wonderful priest in Chicago, who, well into his eighties, worked tirelessly in his many works of apostolate. Father Kemper's father always had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart and never wearied of recommending people to say, "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in Thee."

He had done wonders to spread everywhere copies of the Twelve Promises made by Our Lord to Saint Margaret Mary, on behalf of those devoted to His Sacred Heart. These he had translated into all sorts of languages—Arabic, Chinese, the different Indian dialects, and so forth. Father Kemper assured

me that he circulated these literally by the million. Often on the eve of a First Friday, he would see his father going to the post office laden with parcels containing hundreds of thousands of copies of the Promises. They were being dispatched to the ends of the earth.

Pope Leo XIII heard of this man's zeal and wrote him a personal letter commending him for his fine work. Moreover, the Holy Father incorporated into his Encyclical on the Sacred Heart, some of Mr. Kemper's ideas on the devotion.

One Holy Thursday, this saintly man spent nearly the whole day before the Altar of Repose. He returned at evening, had his supper, and retired. He was found dead in bed on Good Friday, beside him the book he had been reading. It was open to the chapter entitled, "Easter in Heaven."

A New Devotion

Pope Pius XII was concerned, in the first place, "to admonish all these Our children, who, in their prejudice, sometimes go so far as to consider this devotion unsuitable, not to say harmful, in the face of spiritual needs felt by the Church today. Some fail to distinguish between the devotion itself, in its essentials, and various special forms of piety that the Church commends and promotes but does not impose as an obligation. Others who devote the greater part of their time, energies, and resources to teaching and disseminating Catholic truth and inculcating Catholic social doctrine . . . assert that this devotion is burdensome and of little or no value. Others look upon it as a sentimental form of piety . . . more fit for women than for men of culture, of whom they deem it in some way unworthy."

The Pope takes all these critics back to Holy Scripture and the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, showing forcibly how futile and superficial these objections are seen to be.

The Sacred Heart is worthy of love and adoration for two reasons. First, it is the Heart of a divine Person, the Incarnate Son of God; secondly, because it is the symbol most suited to express the love of God for us and our consequent

obligation and privilege to love Him in return. The revelations made to Saint Margaret Mary were new only because they emphasized a devotion that was always in the Church; namely, the love we owe to God in return for His love of us. This emphasis was necessary, Our Lord explained to His chosen servant, because “the charity of men had grown cold; because of the frightful sin and sacrilege and ingratitude of the vast majority of mankind.”

Our Lord, therefore, came to Saint Margaret Mar and gave her the mission to stir up His love once more in men’s hearts and He showed her His own Heart as a symbol of the deep love He had for mankind. Hence, devotion to the Sacred Heart has always been in the Church. It is the motive goading people to scale the heights of holiness. “It is the charity of Christ that drives us forward.” It is senseless, therefore, bordering on blasphemy, to assert that it is a devotion devoid of solid foundation in Catholic dogma or to affirm that its appeal is only for the sentimental.

True, specific forms that the devotion takes may not, and need not, necessarily attract everyone. True also, the revelations made to Saint Margaret Mary did much to increase and popularize the devotion. At the same time—and this point must be stressed—the revelations do not constitute the devotion. The revelations gave impetus to the devotion, but its foundations are to be sought for in the New Testament and even in the Old Testament. This is true because devotion to the Sacred Heart is simply “the will to give oneself readily to the service of God.” This is Saint Thomas’ definition of devotion, and, asks the Pope, “what more obligatory or necessary, what nobler or more attractive service of God, than that which is given to His love?”

“Let everyone fully understand, therefore, that, in the worship of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, external acts do not hold the primary place; nor is the chief reason for that worship to be sought in the favors that Christ has promised in private revelations.”

Ways and Means

Some Catholics practice the Holy Hour, the “Nine Fridays,” and the Apostleship of Prayer with commendable zeal. Some Catholics are attracted by promises made by Our Lord to those who are devoted to His Sacred Heart. For instance, Saint Margaret Mary affirms that, through this devotion “tepid souls will become fervent.” So, a parent is drawn to the devotion in the hope that an errant son may be converted through it. Saint Margaret Mary tells us that the Sacred Heart promises to restore peace in families that are disunited, if they practice this devotion. A sorely-tried husband or wife hears of this and resolves to follow the saint’s recommendations, trusting that happiness may be given back to the members of the family.

“I will give to priests the power to touch the most hardened sinners.” This, the saint says, was told her by Our Lord, speaking of priests devoted to His Sacred Heart. A good priest, worried about sinners in his parish, may well be alerted by this assurance and undertake to spread and practice the devotion.

Then there is the “great promise.” Saint Margaret Mary explains that Our Lord told her those who make the Nine First Fridays will not die without their sacraments, nor in His displeasure. Anyone meditating deeply and prayerfully on this promise, very understandably, might be led to receive Holy Communion on the days mentioned.

The Same Root

All such specific forms of devotion stem from the same root. They are expressions of our love of Our Lord, of our confidence and our desire to prove that our protestations of love are genuine. As such, they are excellent. As such, the Church approves of them, commends them to the faithful, and rejoices when she learns that they are spreading. However, the Holy Father’s point is that these do not constitute devotion to the Sacred Heart, though undoubtedly, they may help foster it and, in many cases, they certainly do.

An excellent Catholic may be deeply devoted to the Sacred Heart and never engage to do any of these things. The case might be exceptional but it can easily be envisioned because devotion to the Sacred Heart is devotion to His love for us; a fervent purpose and desire to love Him in return; and an ardent zeal to draw others to His love. Such devotion has always been in the Church, as the Holy Father went on to show. Hence, the charge made against some Catholics is to be admitted as *ius*. The charge is that their “devotion” is based on a mere selfish interest, that they are actuated merely by a desire to gain personal advantages, and that they completely misunderstand the essentials of the devotion and concentrate on what is only accidental and secondary.

“The purpose of the “promises,” concludes Pope Pius XII, “was that men might more zealously discharge the duties of the Catholic religion; that is to say, duties of love and reparation, and thus serve their own spiritual interests in the best possible manner.”

“Here, we have not an ordinary exercise of piety that can be freely neglected for other forms of devotion or esteem of little importance. Rather, there is question of a practice intimately related to achieving Christian perfection.”

“Behold This Heart”

Our Lord showed His Sacred Heart to Saint Margaret Mary. From every side of It, flames of fire were issuing forth, which He explained symbolized the fire of love for us sinners that consumed Him. “Behold this Heart on fire with love....”

The lucid teaching of the Holy Father echoes the Master’s voice. His Vicar too exhorts us to behold this Heart. He takes us through the Old Testament and New Testament, insisting on the expressions and proofs of God’s love of us that crowd into every page. Holy Scripture, it is quite true, does not make explicit mention of the Heart. However, this omission “cannot even faintly obscure the fact that the divine charity towards us, which is the principal reason for this devotion, is proclaimed and instilled, by means of the most moving images, both in the Old Testament and New Testament.”

In one instance of this love, symbolized by the Sacred Heart, the Pope refers us to the prophet Osee who has given us the clearest and most powerful expression of the abiding love of God for His people . . . an anxious love, a holy love, a love that is consistent with the demands of justice, such as is felt by a compassionate loving father or by a husband whose honor has been slighted. Osee depicts our God as eager to heal the breach and to assure His ungrateful people that His love is not weakened or extinguished by their sin. Justice calls for punishment. However, once the demands of justice have been met, let God's errant children draw nearer to Him than ever.

Then there is the wonderful story of divine love, traceable throughout the long, forty-year journey of the Israelites across the desert to the Promised Land. Time and time again, they fell into idolatry; time and time again they forgot their promises to love God and to serve Him. He never rejected them. Each time the promises were renewed, the loving mercy of God prevailed. He forgave them and restored them to His friendship.

All this was a foreshadowing of the supreme love of the Redeemer to come. The Christian Covenant is "sustained by a far more bountiful outpouring of grace and truth" than was the Ancient Covenant. So, we are invited to ponder prayerfully in our hearts the merciful love of the Blessed Trinity and of the divine Redeemer. The human race was absolutely powerless to atone for its sins. It would remain estranged from God and banished from heaven to this day, to the end of time, and throughout eternity were it not for "the exceeding great love" that our Mediator showed for us. He loved us even when we were dead in sin, quickening us again to a new life in union with Himself.

A Real Man

Since He was a real Man, like us in everything other than sin, it follows beyond all question that He had a Heart like ours, a heart that beat with love and was affected by other human emotions. These, indeed, were in complete harmony with His human will. "The only begotten Son of God took on a human nature capable of suffering and dying, chiefly for this reason—that He desired to offer a bloody sacrifice on the Cross, so as to accomplish the work

of human salvation.” He would thus become, as Saint Paul described Him, “like unto His brethren in all things, a merciful and faithful high priest before God, a propitiation for the sins of the people.”

“Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” The Pope’s argument is that devotion to the Sacred Heart is the will to give oneself to God, thus making a return of love for love. This love existed before God laid the foundations of the world.

Accommodating Himself to our modes of expression, God assures us by the prophet saying, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” He tells us, secondly, that His attitude towards us at this moment is one of love. “I have thee graven in My hands.” People who are forgetful will take care not to allow some object they value leave their hand. They cannot forget it as long as they hold it. Now, “the souls of the just are in the hand of God.” Finally, that love that He has will never wane. “Can a mother forget her infant, so as not to remember the child of her womb? Even if she should forget, I will not forget thee.”

Stop and Listen

Hence, concerning the love that God bears each of us, we may say, “it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.” Any words we employ to express the stunning reality of this statement must always prove pitifully inadequate. Realization will come only through the action of grace generously granted to the soul that prays and that ponders, like Our Lady, the entire marvelous story in the heart. The man who begins to come to grips with the truth will rise from his knees, transformed into a new person, like Saul on the Damascus Road.

“My divine Heart,” He told Saint Margaret Mary, “is so inflamed with love for men, and for you in particular, that, not being able any longer to restrain within Itself the flames of Its ardent charity, It must spread them everywhere through your means and manifest Itself to men that they may be enriched with Its precious treasures.” She writes in another place, “He was brilliant with

glory. His five wounds shone like five suns. Flames darted forth from all parts of His sacred Humanity, but especially from His adorable breast. This resembled a furnace and, upon opening, it displayed to me His loving and amiable Heart, the living source of those flames.”

Such passages might be multiplied. She repeats herself. Her sentences are at times long and involved. She is diffident and fearful of being deceived. She longs for the coming of the priest promised to her, Our Lord’s “faithful friend and perfect servant, who would teach her to know her Savior and abandon herself completely to Him.”

When Our Blessed Lady heard the angel’s message she too was agitated—*turbata est*. The prospect of the place assigned to her in the divine scheme left her breathless with amazement and fear. A similar reaction is easy to discern in Saint Margaret Mary. To her timidity and joy combined, must be attributed the fact that at times she is almost incoherent in her account. She is speaking under strong emotion.

Love for the Sinner

The emphasis on God’s love for us sinners is thus the first portion of the message of the Sacred Heart. The Holy Father has shown us the depth of the foundations upon which this astonishing truth rests. He moves on now to underline another truth conveyed by Christ to His chosen servant. This was a complaint, wrung from Him by the sins and ingratitude of the vast bulk of mankind. “They have nothing but coldness and rebuffs,” He told her, “for all My eagerness to do them good. Behold this Heart which has so loved men, which has spared Itself in nothing, even to being exhausted and consumed, in order to testify to them Its love. And the greater number make Me no other return than ingratitude, by their coldness and forgetfulness of Me in this Sacrament of love. What is still more painful to Me is the fact that it is souls consecrated to Me who use Me thus.”

“Many of the Church’s children,” writes Pius XII, “by their numerous sins and weaknesses, disfigure the beautiful countenance of their Mother, which is

reflected in them. If it causes us keen suffering to behold the weak faith of the good, in whose souls, deceived by the false desire for the things of this world, the flame of divine love burns low and is gradually being extinguished, we suffer much more intensely from the evil machinations of the wicked. Today more than ever, impious men, as if impelled by the infernal enemy, are consumed with implacable and undisguised hatred of God and of His Church.”

So, it is clear that the complaint wrung from the Heart of Christ three hundred years ago is still echoing throughout our world in the twentieth century.

Reparation

Christ stood on the balcony of Pilate’s palace. He was crowned with thorns. His body was a mass of wounds. They had placed a reed in His hand in mockery of His royalty.

Pilate exclaimed, “Behold the Man.” The fearful answer was hurled back saying, “Away with Him. Crucify Him. His blood be upon us and upon our children.” Today, the same Christ stands before the modern world. “Behold this Heart,” He cries, “on fire with love of men.” Again, we hear the terrible rejection, “We will not have this Man to rule over us.”

Once again, realization of all that this implies will begin to dawn upon our minds only through prayer and serious meditation. When we pray and when, through the grace granted us, we are able to see and grasp the deep significance of what we have just read, we can never be the same again. “Christ needs YOU,” cries the Pope. “The Church needs YOU.” For what purpose does the Church need you? It needs you to make reparation to the Sacred Heart.

The Holy Father expands on “the growing dominion over the hearts of men of a false materialist philosophy and way of life, while on all sides the free, unrestrained sway of the passions is proposed as an ideal. Little wonder if, in such circumstances many hearts lose the fervor of charity, which is the supreme law of the Christian religion....”

This state of things is a challenge more than a threat. From every analogy in history, a period like ours should be prolific in saints. The very fact that so many are consumed with “undisguised hatred of God” proves to be a mighty incentive to the good to love Him more than ever. And their love seeks to express itself in the deeds of sacrifice.

Saint Paul described the essential notion of reparation when he wrote, “I fill up in my flesh the things that are wanting to the sufferings of Christ, for His Body which is the Church.” On every side opportunities occur. There is the long-drawn-out sickness, the acute financial worry, or the constant anxiety about the wayward son or daughter. Other grievous trials can be made into material for reparation if we train ourselves to unite our sufferings with His on Calvary.

Then there are the petty annoyances—a wrong number dialed on the phone and much consequent confusion; a visitor who besieges us at a moment when we are particularly busy, the baby waking up at night, the heavy rain that spoils our outing, or the disappointing news we get in a letter. “In all things seek God.” This is sound advice from Saint Ignatius. The art of supernaturalizing everything makes everything material for a life devoted to reparation.

Among the exquisite pieces of literature that deal with devotion to the Sacred Heart, we must recognize the Mass and Office composed by order of Pope Pius XI. These, too, like Pius XII’s Encyclical, open up “the fountains of the Savior” to the thirsting soul, assuaging its longing for the living waters of true devotion. We recommend the Preface in that Mass as a sample of the riches to be discovered.

Preface

This Preface refers, in the first place, to the Sacred Heart as “the treasure-house of the divine bounty.” When men have anything valuable, they take very good care to keep it under lock and key. The last thing a sensible man of

business will do, before leaving his store at evening time, is to make sure he has put that day's earnings into the safe. He will slam the door and tug at it to test it and make certain that no thief can possibly force it open.

The Heart of Christ is a treasure house where riches are accumulated by Him at such a terrible cost—all the sufferings of His Passion. However, at this treasure house, the door always stands wide open—day and night. The Preface speaks of the Son of God Who was pierced by the lance as He hung on the Cross. The soldier's spear opened His Heart that day and It has never been closed since that day.

Hence, we have the "*apertum Cor,*" the open Heart. Why? What is the reason for this seeming disregard for the treasure? Is the Owner not afraid of thieves breaking through and stealing? No. A man with the wealth of earth is fearful because, no matter how much he possesses, his supply is necessarily limited. However, the wealth of the Sacred Heart is inexhaustible. There is no need for lock or key here. He ardently desires, as He explained to Saint Margaret Mary, that the entire world would come and draw off from the treasures He offers. They are endless. No matter how much will be taken from what is infinite, infinity must ever remain. The only limitation is the measure of each soul's capacity to take and receive.

The glorious words of the Preface now proceed to draw up a catalogue of what gifts are waiting for the soul willing to search for them in this treasure house. There are "torrents of mercy and grace." One thinks of the thousands and thousands of tons of water falling in Niagara. One remembers the mighty dams in Holland built to keep back the waters of the ocean. These feebly illustrate the "torrents" in the Heart of Christ, as they keep on ever pressing, ever eager, to break down the obstacles raised by our own miserable selfishness.

In this treasure house, with the door wide open, the soul finds "mercy and grace." Mercy! Here is the gift that blesses Him Who gives and him who takes. That it is a source of blessings to the recipient is obvious. Here is a line of thought to return to again and again in prayer: If ever I committed a mortal sin, even one single mortal sin, I owe it only to the infinite mercy of the Sacred Heart that I am not in hell at this moment.

As for Him from Whom this gift of mercy comes to us, we remember how He described the joy seen before the angels of God when one sinner does penance.

Side by side with mercy, there is also to be given from out the treasures, the gift of grace. Our whole booklet might be employed in the effort to speak about the marvels of divine grace and we should still be far from having finished. "If thou didst know the gift of God!" All we can say here is that grace makes us sons and daughters, in a real sense, of God; that it gives us a sharing in His own life; that it enriches in a marvelous manner our every action; and that it ensures our eternal salvation. The Sacred Heart is the source and fountainhead of this gift.

This Heart, the Preface continues, never ceased to burn with love for us. We have tried, in language that is halting and wide of the mark, to offer some ideas about this gift of divine love and its claims upon us. We merely add here that God not only permits us to love Him, but actually commands it! "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, with all thy strength, with all thy mind."

This Heart is a harbor of peace and rest and tranquility to those who are in love with Christ. "In peace, in the self-same, shall I sleep and take my rest, for Thou, O Lord, hast confirmed me in hope." A magnificent example of the peace communicated to the earnest soul is Blessed Claude de la Colombiere's Act of Confidence in God.

Finally, the Heart of Christ is a secure place of sanctuary for the repentant sinner. We know there were places where a criminal could flee, and, if he reached one of these, he acquired the right of sanctuary. His enemies were forbidden to lay a hand on him as long as he remained in such a refuge. The Sacred Heart is just such an abode of safety where the sinner is immune from all serious danger to his soul.

Summary

In case you do not have your missal handy, it may be worthwhile transcribing the pertinent portions of this Preface.

“It is right and just that we should praise Thee, O God, Who didst will that Thy only-begotten Son, as He hung on the Cross, should be pierced by the lance of the soldier; that the open Heart, treasure house of divine bounty, might pour forth upon us torrents of mercy and grace; and that His Heart, which never ceased to burn with love for us, might become to a place of rest and to the repentant might be opened out as a sanctuary and a refuge. . . .”

Behold this Heart! The key words to remember, as we meditate on this wonderful Preface, indicating the treasures to be looked for, are an OPEN Heart; TORRENTS of MERCY and GRACE; LOVE; REST; a SANCTUARY and a REFUGE.

On the first page of this pamphlet, we printed Saint Paul’s rousing cry. “Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?” In view of all we have seen, it seems fair to suggest that that same cry, slightly adapted, might rise up in the Heart of Christ and form itself on His lips. It is abundantly clear that, as far as He is concerned, nothing is ever going to separate us from Him. He is determined to have us, at almost any cost.

“Who shall separate ME from the love of men’s souls? Shall tribulation? Or distress? Or famine? I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers . . . nor any other creature shall be able to separate Me from the love of men, which wells up in My Sacred Heart, the Heart of Christ Jesus the Lord.”

The Promises of The Sacred Heart

*Made by Our Lord to Saint Margaret Mary
in favor of those who practice devotion to His Sacred Heart.*

I will give them the graces necessary for their state.

I will give peace in their families.

I will comfort them in all their trials and afflictions.

I will be their secure refuge in life and death.

I will bestow abundant blessings on all their undertakings.

Sinners will find My Heart an ocean of mercy.

Tepid souls shall become fervent.

Fervent souls shall advance rapidly towards perfection.

I will bless every dwelling in which an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored.

I will give priests a facility in converting the most hardened souls.

The, persons who spread this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be effaced.

I promise thee, in the excessive mercy of My Heart, that Its all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on nine consecutive first Fridays of the month the grace of final repentance, they shall neither die in My disfavor nor without receiving their Sacraments, for My Divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment.

Nihil Obstat:

BERNARD O'CONNOR

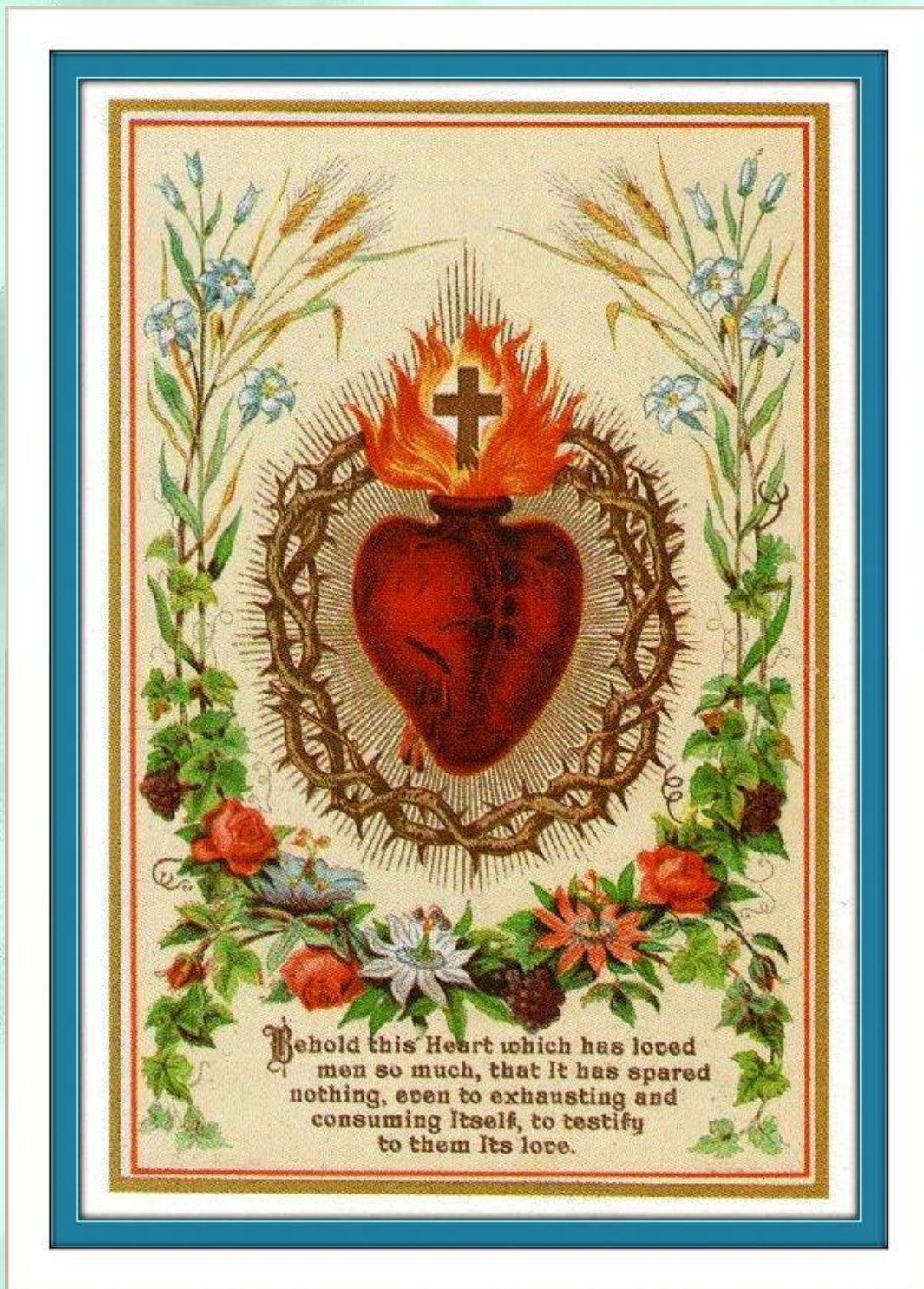
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The Sacred Heart depicted on an antique holy card.

(The original is in the Public Domain as it was published before 1923.)





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