

FAMILY: HONOUR THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS

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Honouring the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is more than a devotional practice. The prayer of the Church venerates and honours the Heart of Jesus just as it invokes his most holy name. It adores the incarnate Word and his Heart which, out of love for men, he allowed to be pierced by our sins¹. The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus presents us with the opportunity to reflect on the relevance of this venerable symbol in our daily lives.

This year the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus on the 23rd day of June, Friday. This yearly celebration invites us as individuals, spousal couples, youth, children and families to honor the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in our thoughts, desires, words and actions in our day-to-day living. The Lord promised that families who honor His Sacred Heart will be restored to Him and He will bless and sanctify them. Families who put our Lord first will be strengthened against the worldly forces that seek to destroy them. Every home that exposes and honors the image of His Sacred Heart will be abundant in blessings and salvation will be given to all who continue in their devotion.

The image of the Sacred Heart is never mentioned as such in Sacred Scripture, but its meaning is found spanning each page of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The Word of God chosen for the Solemnity (Deut. 7: 6-11; 1Jn. 4: 7-16; Mt 11: 25-30) points to this fact and frame the Sacred Heart in terms of two central themes: love and closeness. They speak of the love of God as a shepherdly love, an involved love, a powerful love; a love that is up-close and personal, that seeks out the lost, heals the afflicted, strengthens the contrite, upholds the humble, and calls men and women of every time and place to be all they can be, to love in return, to have life in abundance: to be holy. We see here that the image of the Sacred Heart is intimately linked with the image of the Good Shepherd.

Prophet Ezekiel speaks of how God Himself will tend the sheep of His flock; how He will “gather them from foreign lands” and “lead them out from among the peoples,”

pasturing them on verdant mountains, that they may lie down and be at rest. These words are echoed in today's Psalm, the renowned and beloved Psalm 23, which conveys the profound peace of a sheep of God's flock.

St. John, the Apostle, speaks of the inseparability of the love of God and love of our neighbour. St. John, in his letter, gives us the paramount reason; love comes from God (v.4:7). If we can love God, it is because God loved us first (v.4:19); if we love each other it is because God's love extends among us (v.4:12). John also links the love and faith in God: a true Christian believer is someone who believes that God is love. "Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." (4: 16).

Precisely this is what the Church celebrates on the solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, a love so profound, so immediate but immense that it defies human reason. It goes beyond any logical constructs and extends beyond our faculty to comprehend. The Sacred Heart is the symbol of God's incarnate love, a shepherdly love, a dynamic love: a love brought to life by the Incarnation of Jesus. In Christ, we realize that our God cares for His sheep not in a general or indifferent way, rather it is an intense solicitude for each and every sheep, each and every one of us desires relationship and intimacy. God so desires this intimate relationship that He willed to humble Himself and enter the human nature. He chose not just to admire the sheep from afar, but to dwell in their midst, to smell as they smell and devote His entire life and livelihood to their care. In this way, the Incarnation is the ultimate seal of God's desire to be close; the ultimate sign that God's love reaches out to us, invites us, draws us—*personally*. By the coming of Christ and the wounds of His death, all boundaries and barriers have been torn down. Thus, it is appropriate that Incarnation and Passion both feature in the depiction of the Sacred Heart. The heart depicted is a human heart, a fleshly heart, a living heart; but it is also a pierced heart, a bleeding heart, encircled with a crown of thorns and punctured by the blade of a spear. Jesus' heart reaches out for us, it goes out in search of us; it pines after us as a shepherd for a lost sheep.

In the parable of the Lost Sheep, the Shepherd goes in search of the lost one thereby showing **concern** and once he finds it, he keeps it close to his heart which shows the **love** and the **warmth** of the Shepherd's heart and finally, he brings it back to the fold so that it may have **communion** with the other sheep (Lk. 15: 1-7). This is one of the

parables where Jesus tries to tell His followers that He is the Good Shepherd for he loves us much more than a shepherd loves his sheep (Jn. 10:10). The Shepherd's loving heart follows it wherever it goes, always seeking the good of His fold, gathering them together in love and leading them in peace by His gentle voice. Each of us is the lost sheep: as individuals, as communities, and as a human family. God seeks to reconcile us to Himself and loves us so much that He sends Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in search of us, to bear us on His shoulders and bring us back rejoicing to the eternal pastures of the New Jerusalem.

Sister St. Margaret Mary Alacoque who had a vision of Jesus around the year 1672, described that His Heart was on fire and surrounded by a crown of thorns. Our Lord told her that the flames represented His love for humanity, and the thorns represented man's sinfulness and ingratitude. The Promises of the Sacred Heart to her are as follows: (There are 33 promises but these twelve are the main ones.)

Our Lord promised:

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will give peace in their families.
3. I will console them in all troubles.
4. They shall find in My Heart an assured refuge during life and especially at the hour of death.
5. I will pour abundant blessings on all their undertakings.
6. Sinners will find in My Heart the source and Infinite Ocean of Mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall speedily rise to great perfection.
9. I will bless the homes in which the image of My Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honoured.
10. I will give to priests the power to touch the most hardened hearts.
11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their name written in My Heart and it shall never be effaced.
12. The All-Powerful love of My Heart will grant those who shall receive Holy Communion on the First Friday of nine consecutive months; the grace of final

repentance; they shall not die under my displeasure, nor without receiving the Sacraments; My Heart shall be their assured refuge at that last hour.

So, on the solemn day and throughout this year, let us take to heart the rich meaning of this ancient devotion; let us allow ourselves to be struck by the love of Christ. In the ordinary moments of our lives, in the simple as much as the spectacular, in the majestic as well as the mundane, may we be transformed by the knowledge that we are loved and respond with gratitude to love in return. May our hearts beat along with the heart of Jesus, be conformed unto His, and in doing so become channels of His intense, intimate love for each person; that our hearts too may be set ablaze with the incarnate love of God.

The month of June is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. If you haven't already done so, I invite you to enthrone the Sacred Heart of Jesus in your home. You will have the assurance of knowing that, by God's grace, you have helped to strengthen and protect your family in their walk with God.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, protect our families.

Ref.

1. CCC 2669