



LIGHT & LIFE

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REFLECTIONS ON THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

By Fr. Peter Do, O.P.

[Fr. Peter Do, OP entered the Western Dominican Province in 2001 and was ordained to the presbyterate in 2009. He has served in campus ministry, parochial ministry, and as Promoter of Campus Ministry for the Western Province. He currently serves as the Prior at Holy Rosary Priory in Portland, Oregon.]

Reflecting on the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I can recall vividly my first encounter with this devotion a few years ago. I was taking a break and skiing with a priest friend in the snowy mountains of Colorado. At the time, I was also helping out at the local parish. After an early morning Mass one day, a parishioner who happened to be a ski instructor came up to us, aware of the fact that we both enjoyed skiing, he offered to give us free skiing lessons. Since we were both amateur skiers, we immediately and gladly accepted the offer. This ski instructor did make one request which he said he would share with us only after the skiing lessons. So after a day of lessons, we sat down with him for dinner. Curious to know what he wanted from us, we asked him about the special request. Initially, I thought that he wanted a special Mass intention. I was surprised when he asked us to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus! Specifically, he wanted us to preach on First Friday devotions.

Surprised by this request, I asked him how and why he wanted us to focus on preaching about the Sacred Heart

and First Friday devotions. He began to share with us his conversion story. Of course, with his permission, I would like to share with you his story. Before his conversion to the Catholic faith, he had reached a very dark and lonely period in his life. Filled with despair, he had contemplated thoughts of ending his life. One day as he sat in the kitchen with a knife on the table,

he tried to grab the knife. But inexplicably, he felt a force preventing him from reaching for the knife. Thinking that he was not making enough of an effort, he continued to force himself to grab the knife with both his hands. Then all of a sudden, this invisible force pulled him and the chair he was sitting on eight feet away from the table. Almost immediately he felt that an incredible feeling of love enveloped him. It was a feeling of being loved unconditionally. He had never felt like this before in his life. He didn't quite understand what it all meant. Eventually, he went to church and talked with the pastor about the experience, but still didn't quite understand it all. The priest continued meeting with him and one day while the priest was talking about the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it all came together. What he experienced on that day when he was overwhelmed



SACRED HEART OF JESUS
Pompeo Girolamo Batoni (1708-87)

with love was what the priest described as the Sacred Heart, the chief sign and symbol of the love Jesus had for him. It was this experience and this understanding of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that was the pivotal moment when he knew he was called to become Catholic.

As I reflect on this conversion story and my subsequent devotion to the Sacred Heart, this verse from Scripture

(Continued on page 4)

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**The Sacred Heart of Jesus and
Immaculate Heart of Mary**

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

From the Depths of Divine Love

By Fr. Peter Hannah, O.P.

[Fr. Peter Hannah, OP, was born in Temple, Texas. His father was in the military and his mother was a teacher. He became passionate about golf in high school and college, and aspired to be a professional. He entered the Western Dominican Province in 2007 and was ordained to the presbyterate in 2014. He currently serves as an Adjunct Professor at the DSPT teaching Scripture.]

It is difficult to think of a symbol with more far-reaching implications in human experience than the heart. Biologically and in terms of human relationships, the heart is—as it were—central. The biological organ itself evokes wonder the more one knows of it. And the experiences we generally associate with "matters of the heart" run the gamut, from nostalgic affection for places and things, to the bonds of family, to the emotional dramatics of romance. It is not too surprising, then, that this pulsating and vital organ within us occupies an important place in religious language and devotion. "Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength," says the Lord in issuing to us the greatest of all commandments. Two feasts every year are dedicated to, of all things, this physical organ and all it stands for: the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (June 11) and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (June 12). Our Lord's heart and Our Lady's heart have been elevated by Divine Providence to a place of honor, given the integral roles each played in our redemption. The hearts of Jesus and Mary are truly fountains of divine grace, which finally is the only power which can heal the brokenness sin has wrought.

ORGAN OF LIFE, SOURCE OF DESIRE

The beating and fleshy and many-chambered organ in our chest is the vital center for our bodies for the whole of our time on earth. It is in fact the first organ to develop in the womb and begins pumping blood in a tiny and fragile manner after only three weeks, sustained and nourished by the life-system of the mother. One of the most time-honored pastimes for families, of course, is for the mother to invite her other children to place their ears on her belly to listen for the sound of the child's beating heart within. The biblical writer of Ecclesiastes knew that only God could be behind such a marvelous process of growth: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all" (Eccles. 11:5). Somehow from its tiniest beginnings, the heart grows into maturity and sustains our

life until the moment we leave this earth. Then the nurse or attending doctor checks our pulse to determine finally if the heart is still delivering life-blood to the body or if the "way of the spirit" has withdrawn. The same biblical writer memorializes this moment too, when in modern parlance we might say that the heart monitor flatlines: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccles. 12:7).

If the heart is a mysterious and marvelous thing on a biological level, its symbolism in human experience reaches further still. We say of physical locations marked by special memories or natural beauty that they are "close to our heart." Family memories and relationships occupy similar places in our affections and emotional life. On Valentine's day the heart becomes the widespread—if often kitschy—symbol of romantic experience. The arrow one often sees on that day is an idea reaching back into antiquity: Cupid, the god of love, was known to the ancient Romans to strike individuals unawares with pangs of love-longing, often enough in inconvenient or distressing ways. And here one begins to see not only the mystery and beauty of the heart but its potentially problematic qualities.

The word "heart" in modern languages and in ancient ones not only signifies the physical organ but also the vital source of all human desire. And human desires can gain steam in any number of directions, sometimes for good and noble things, and sometimes not. Our Lord in the Gospel of Matthew points to this "duality" in the human heart by exhorting his audience to desire the right things, for "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). It is, therefore, not for nothing that modern popes especially have stressed the importance of two devotions concerned with this vital organ of our life and desire: devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

DEVOTION TO THE HEARTS OF JESUS AND MARY

Devotion (Latin *devotio*) in the Catholic tradition properly indicates a readiness to give oneself in the service and worship of Almighty God. Physical objects like saint's statues, religious icons, or even a physical heart, can be occasions of stirring within oneself this generosity of will, catalyzing an inner-zeal to cling to God as our Source of life and salvation. The physical hearts of Jesus and Mary signify in different ways the tremendous reality of Christ's love in both its divine and human aspects. God has loved the human race from all eternity and has shown us his love by coming among us as a man, trodding the path of human life, and bravely undergoing his passion and death so as to draw us into the life of the Blessed Trinity. And his beating heart, which formed in the womb of the Blessed Virgin after her own heart received the angel's

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word, brings into sharp focus the mystery of divine love flowing to us through Christ's humanity.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus gained momentum especially in the late Middle Ages but its roots go back to Holy Scripture. Jesus declares to a crowd in the Gospel of John that "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'." The Gospel writer John tells us that Jesus said this "about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive" (Jn. 7:37-39). The Fathers of the Church read this passage in relation to the moment after Jesus' death on the cross when the soldiers came and "pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (Jn. 19:34). Jesus, in other words, identifies himself as the source of the living water of grace, a reality which becomes dramatically enacted when his side is pierced on the cross. The Fathers developed a rich theology of the Church from these passages. As Eve, the mother of all the living, was taken from the side of the First Adam in the Garden (Gen. 2:21), so the Church, Mother of souls, sprang from the side of Christ on the Cross. Eve is the bride of the First Adam and the source of natural life for the human race; the Church is the Bride of the New Adam, Christ the Lord, and becomes the source of saving life to souls, sprung as she is from the very Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Medieval theologians developed a kind of spiritual theology of the Sacred Heart, beginning with Sts. Anselm (d. 1109) and Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), and continuing through Sts. Bonaventure (d. 1274), Mechtilde (d. 1180), Gertrude (d. 1302), and many others. St. Margaret Mary Alacoque's revelations between 1673-1674 have given to the devotion many of its modern features, including allotting First Fridays to reception of communion and making reparation for souls. St. John Eudes (d. 1680) especially promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and it was during this time that devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary also arose. As Our Lord's physical heart is a fitting symbol for the depths of his divine love, crystallizing the point where God's infinite grace is mediated through Christ's humanity, so Our Lady's heart was the locus of her reception of the divine word from Gabriel to cooperate in the work of Christ's redemption (Lk. 1:26-38). Our Lady's cooperation in the plan of redemption infused her with an interior life richer than any human being in history. She continually "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19, 2:51), and experienced the Passion of her Son with a closer identification than any other (cf. Lk. 2:35; Jn. 19:26-27). Pope Clement XIII gave official approbation to the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1765, and Pius VII granted permission to celebrate feasts of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1805.

DEVOTIONS SUITED TO OUR TIMES

Pius XI calls devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus a "synthesis of our whole religion" and Pius XII the "highest expression of Christian piety." Of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, one theologian remarks that it "can be regarded as the synthesis of all Marian

doctrine and devotion." The high praise offered for these devotions points to the way they capture the "heart"—pun intended—of our faith.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible testifies to the broken, wavering, and sinful tendencies of the human heart. It is "tortuous...beyond remedy" to the prophet Jeremiah (17:9); God calls it "continually evil" before he sends the Flood (Gen. 6:5); St. Paul associates the "heartless" with all those who have forsaken God (Rom. 1:28-31). And one need not look too far today to see that the essential inclinations of human behavior have not changed. The political, social, and familial crises which have continually struck society in recent years can, in a manner, be traced to disordered desires laying within the human heart. Against the "lust of the flesh...the eyes...and the pride of life" of which St. John speaks, Our Lord urges his followers to acquire purity of heart that we might enjoy a vision of God (Jn. 2:16; Mt 5:8). This purity of heart empowers us to obey the greatest commandment of loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

But how attain such purity and strength of heart? Evidently, through a source of healing, reform, discipline and sustenance from a power larger than ourselves. Our hearts, which mysteriously begin beating just a month after conception and do not cease until death, both sustain our physical life and fill our lives with desires, hopes, dreams, fears, and longings; sometimes these are helpful and good, but often enough they can lead us astray. By cultivating a devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our minds and hearts are turned to all that God desires us to be. Beginning with the very depths of our desires. Mary received the divine Word with perfect purity and faith, and continued meditating on the mysteries of her divine Son's life, finally culminating with a deep identification with his suffering and death on the Cross. She who was miraculously preserved from sin focused her heart's desire on God's love in a manner more fully than any human being in history apart from her son. Our Lord's tiny human heart takes flesh and develops in Mary's very body, begotten by the Father and sustained by the Spirit. It animates his earthly life and ministry, and is pierced by the soldier's lance on the Cross, bursting open into streams of divine grace which continue to nourish the Church. Through baptism, the eucharist and other sacraments, we experience these "rivers of living water." Our hearts, broken as they are by sin, receive the marvelous gift of forgiveness, healing, and restoration, that we may enjoy a vision of God forever in unity with that love which comes to us through Jesus' Heart. Transformed by the graces available through the Sacred Heart of Christ and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we acquire a proper humility before the Divine Majesty to seek and dwell upon things that are good, beautiful, and true. In this year of 2021, may we all seek such reformation of heart, humble yet confident that Our Lady and Our Lord are strongly disposed to assist us with such reformation, according to their proper role in the divine plan, from the depths of the divine Love they each knew intimately. ■

Sacred Heart of Jesus (Continued from page 1)

comes to mind: "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart" (Mt 11:28-30). There will be times in life when we feel lonely, exhausted, and frustrated, Jesus invites us in this passage to place ourselves, our worries and fears, into His sacred, gentle, and humble heart. His heart has already been pierced for us. From his wounded heart, we can experience his infinite love for us. From His Sacred Heart, blood and water flow to overwhelm us with unfathomable love.

[Jesus] has loved us all with a human heart. For this reason, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation, 'is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that... love with which the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings' without exception. (Pope Pius XII's encyclical, *Haurietis Aquas* (1956)(CCC 478)



IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY
Leopold Kupelwieser 1796-1862, CC by SA 4.0

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes these very words to stress the importance and purpose of this devotion (cf. CCC 478). This devotion continues to strengthen our Catholic faith to the present day. This year, the Solemnity Most Sacred Heart of Jesus will be on Friday, June 11, 2021. The following day, we will celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Let us not forget the Heart that was closest to the Heart of Jesus!

THE HOLY HEART OF ST. JOHN VIANNEY

Over the years, the Sacred Heart of Jesus has become more and more the sign and symbol of my priesthood. As the eternal High Priest, Jesus offers the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. I believe the priesthood flows from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and calls all priests to give of themselves to the service of the Church and the people of God. A few years ago when I was traveling to a conference, I was surprised one morning as I was

Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."
John 7:37-38

preparing to concelebrate Mass with a few hundred other priests present, the conference organizers said that they had a first class relic of St. John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests. Any priest who wanted an opportunity to venerate the relic were given the chance. At first, I thought the relic might be a small vial of his blood or a piece of his bone. Out of curiosity, I approached the relic after waiting in line. What I saw was the complete heart of the saint, still physically and completely intact! As I knelt to venerate this relic, I thought of two things: first, this saint can truly "read" a person's heart. Secondly, this saintly priest truly had a heart that was modeled after the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In silence, I asked the intercession of this saint to be a better priest and to have a heart more like the heart of Jesus. Now, I ask for your prayers for me and for all priests throughout the world. It is not surprising that a few years ago, I discovered that the World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests takes place every year on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests was established by Pope St. John Paul II in 2002 and encourages priests to reflect upon the importance and dignity of their vocation.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us. Most Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

St. John Vianney, pray for us. ■

Update on the Rosary Center Renovation

Dear faithful supporters of the Rosary Center & Confraternity, many of you helped us this past year by making a special gift to the Rosary Center renovation project. THANK YOU! To date, with your support, we have raised \$513,000, which is a little over half of our goal! We could not fulfill our mission if not for you, our benefactors. If you are able, please consider making a special gift to help us make badly needed repairs, and to refurbish the offices, chapel, and kitchen. Thank you for your generosity!

Fr. Joseph Sergott OP, Director of the Rosary Center & Promoter of the Rosary Confraternity.

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