

**Homily for Sacred Heart Novena  
Mount Grace Convent  
St. Louis, MO**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here at Mount Grace Convent for this Mass during the Novena to the Sacred Heart. It is a particular joy for me to be here as the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is one of my favorite devotions, as reflected in my episcopal coat of arms. It is a devotion that invites us to consider the boundless love that Christ has for us and His desire for us to remain firmly rooted in that love every day of our lives.

In our Gospel for this evening's Mass, we hear the ever-familiar passage of the Beatitudes preached by Jesus at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. In his Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope St. John Paul II described the Beatitudes as "a sort of self-portrait of Christ, and for this very reason [they] are invitations to discipleship and to communion of life with Christ" (VS 16). We find in the Beatitudes, then, the summary of how each and every one of us is invited to live the unique vocation given to us

by God. Following them leads us to the goal of the Christian life: seeing God face to face in the glory of Heaven.

In the sixth Beatitude, Jesus tells us that in order to enjoy this beatific vision, we must be “pure of heart” (Matthew 5:8). Purity of heart is something that all Christians will struggle with, regardless of their level of holiness. This is due to the fact that even though Original Sin was removed from our souls on the day of our Baptism, the effects of Original Sin remain in the form of concupiscence. Concupiscence is the tendency toward evil and sin, although in itself it does not constitute sin. We still engage the gift of our free will in either assenting to or rejecting those temptations as they arise in our hearts.

To achieve purity of heart is to constantly battle against these temptations that lead us away from God. Rejecting those temptations leads us to gaze upon God as the one source of true happiness in this life and in the life to come. To give in to those temptations is to seek our happiness in something other than God, and so gaze upon the things of this world and away from God.

Even the greatest saints struggled against the challenges of concupiscence, so it should not discourage us to know that we will

continue to struggle with this throughout our lives. We are called to have faith that God will give us the grace necessary to overcome those trials. St. Paul explains this beautifully when he writes that “God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial He will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor 10:13).

The image of the Sacred Heart shows a heart surrounded by flames, indicating the intensity of His love for each of His children. It is out of that love that He provides the assistance that we need in order to be victorious in having the impurities of our human hearts burned away. This process is not always pleasant, but the reward, that of seeing God face to face for eternity, is worth it, and so we should embrace it with faith in His help, hope in His reward, and love in His presence.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart also invites us to look beyond ourselves to the struggles of others. If we were to focus only on our individual efforts of purifying our hearts, we would be missing the larger message of this great devotion. In one of the revelations that St. Margaret Mary experienced, Jesus spoke the following words:

Behold the Heart which has so loved men that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify Its love;

and in return, I receive from the greater part only ingratitude, by their irreverence and sacrilege, and by the coldness and contempt they have for Me in this Sacrament of Love.

As a result of this rejection of that love, Jesus asked that the faithful make reparation for such acts.

Reparation is an important element of this devotion and it is to be seen in light of our understanding of the Mystical Body of Christ. All of those who have been baptized into Christ are united to the Head, Jesus Christ. As St. Paul reminds us, “if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it” (1 Cor 12:26). The sins of others should not leave us feeling indifferent, as though they have no bearing on our lives. Instead, we, as members of the Body of Christ, believe that the entire body is weakened as a result of the failings of others. We also believe that there is something that we can do about that, by offering up our prayers and sacrifices for those who weaken the Body of Christ, so that they might experience the conversion necessary to restore what has been damaged by their actions.

Our acts of reparation for sinners are signs of our love for the entire Body of Christ, head and members. We must never give up on anybody, but trust that the fire of God’s love is powerful enough to penetrate the

hearts of even the most hardened sinner, so that they too might resume that struggle for purity of heart which began on the day of their Baptism.

As we continue this Mass, let us turn our gaze to the Heart of Jesus, the salvation of all who trust in Him, and ask that our hearts will continue to be purified so as to seek Him alone. In doing so, our eyes will also look lovingly on others, especially those who have turned away from Christ's love, and our hearts will burn with the same fire as that of His Sacred Heart. That burning furnace of charity desires that all hearts will seek to be purified and so gaze upon His glory for all eternity. O Jesus meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto thine.

May God give us this grace. Amen.