

Homily for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart

**Sacred Heart Church of Saint Katherine Drexel Parish
Springfield, Illinois**

June 8, 2018

**†Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”¹

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good to be here to celebrate this Pontifical Solemn Mass on the occasion of the patronal feast of your church. 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 share that love with others through living as His disciples in the midst of the world today.

Last week we concluded the month of May, which is dedicated to our Blessed Mother and we began this month of June, dedicated to the Sacred

Heart of her beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is often said that the mother is the heart of the home. However, on this the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we honor that which should be at the heart of every home. But why do we specifically honor the heart of our Lord? In speaking about this feast, Pope Benedict XVI said:

In biblical language, "heart" indicates the center of the person where his sentiments and intentions dwell. In the Heart of the Redeemer we adore God's love for humanity, His will for universal salvation, His infinite mercy. Practicing devotion to the Sacred Heart of Christ therefore means adoring that Heart which, after having loved us to the end, was pierced by a spear and from high on the Cross poured out blood and water, an inexhaustible source of new life"²

One has only to look around to notice how our society, culture, economy, and politics need this Heart today. For, it is true, the more man distances himself from God's love, the more he becomes "heartless" toward to the world around him. Unfortunately, many people have forgotten that -- at the core of who we are as humans -- we were made to let ourselves be loved by God and to respond to His Love by loving our neighbor.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is often depicted as a wounded heart surrounded with a crown of thorns, and encompassed in flames, indicating the intensity of Christ's love for each of His children. While some form of devotion to the Sacred Heart of our Lord has been observed since the twelfth century, the devotion was popularized in France in the late 1600s through the visions of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. In these visions, Our Lord asked for a Feast in reparation for the offenses against His love.

Such reparations are an important element of this devotion and are 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."³ 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 falls 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 sinners, so that they too might come to live as authentic disciples of our Lord.

For those who practice devotion to his Sacred Heart, Our Lord made twelve promises:

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.
3. I will console them in all their troubles.
4. They shall find in My Heart an assured refuge during life and especially at the hour of their death.
5. I will pour abundant blessings on all their undertakings.
6. Sinners shall find in My Heart the source of an 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 where an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored.
10. I will give to priests the power of touching the most hardened hearts.

11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be effaced.
12. The all-powerful love of My Heart will grant to all those who shall receive Communion on the First Friday of nine consecutive months the grace of final repentance; they shall not die under my displeasure, nor without receiving their Sacraments; my heart shall be their assured refuge at that last hour.

In reflecting on these promises, it should be apparent that devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord is not only a source through which we can receive the blessings of God. His heart is also the gate through which we can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven ourselves, and also assist our neighbors on their journey to their heavenly reward as well.

In spite of this devotion being a gateway to heaven, looking at the signs of the times, it seems that Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus has suffered a sort of “cardiac arrest” in modern culture. This decline in devotion is troubling, given that during the first half of the twentieth century the majority of Catholic families had the image of Jesus and his Sacred Heart displayed in their homes, and first Friday devotions were commonplace in many parishes.

Given this decline in devotion to our Lord's Sacred Heart, perhaps it is not surprising that many people would describe the world in which we live today as a loveless and selfish world that is focused on the satisfaction of oneself over the good of others. One might even go so far as to say that it seems as though the world is so preoccupied with present realities that it gives almost no thought to eternity and the everlasting joys that await those who live as Christ's disciples here on earth.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in today's love-deprived world, we must commit ourselves all the more to serving our Lord faithfully by following the example of Jesus Christ and His immeasurable love for us. For, we serve Him only as faithfully as we serve Him lovingly, through giving ourselves in loving service to our neighbors.

This is what devotion to the Sacred Heart is about. It is through the practice of selfless love toward God and our neighbors that we build up the kingdom of God on earth and, in doing so, we show something of the kind of love that our Lord has for all of us.

Therefore, may we commit ourselves to deepen our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Whether through a home enthronement of an image of the Sacred Heart or even just learning more about other devotions to the

Sacred Heart, the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus presents us with the opportunity opportunity to recognize the love that Our Lord has for each one of us, and, therefore, to recognize the true heart in the hearts of our homes, the Sacred Heart of our Lord.

Jesus meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto thine.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Matthew 11:28-30

² Benedict XVI, Angelus 5 June 2005

³ 1 Corinthians 12:26