

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Devotion to the Sacred Heart

A priest from the neighboring Diocese of Buffalo has written a much needed book entitled, *Updated Devotion to the Sacred Heart*. I am grateful to Father Walter Kern for his presentation of the scriptural, theological and liturgical basis for our devotion to the Heart of Christ. (Alba Books — 1974)

Since the II Vatican Council there have interpreted the silence or the statements of the Council Fathers as the basis for downgrading the traditional devotional life of the Church as being a distraction from the Eucharistic liturgy. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is essentially a worship of and response to the Person of Christ and flows from the ultimate understanding that He loves us. The love and the Heart of Jesus are called the objects of our devotion, but each must always be understood as representing the Person of Christ.

A theologian of the stature of Karl Rahner has said, "In devotion to the Sacred Heart, it is the Person of our Lord that is worshiped, under the aspect of the Heart, that is, of His primal, innermost formative center. His Heart is the source of all His attitudes and His behavior toward us, of all that we have experienced of Him in the history of our salvation."

The pages of Scripture tell us that the heart means the whole interior of man — his sentiments, memories, thoughts and plans. The

aptness of the symbol of the heart to capture the reality of the Person of Christ and His personal love for us has been attested by Popes Leo XIII and by Pius XII who promoted devotion to the Heart of Christ.

When the Church speaks of devotion to the Sacred Heart, she means a total dedication, commitment and handing over of oneself to the Person of Christ. This means leaving ourselves open to the Challenge of His Person and His Message — no sentimental journey. It means responding with a total giving in as His ideals and attitudes, His message and life work become known to us.

Devotion to the Heart of Christ was known in some form from the early days of the Church. But in the XVII Century it received new impetus by a special divine intervention in an age when the world needed to be stirred from its apathy and casual attitude towards God's generosity. Our Blessed Lord appeared to St. Margaret Mary and showed her His Sacred Heart and asked her to tell the vision to the whole world which had grown indifferent to His daily and abiding love.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart which has been promoted by this unique manifestation of His love has awakened us to many truths which we are tempted to forget.

It has taught us that we all need a center point in our life more inspiring than an abstract philosophy or a noble cause. This focal point is a loving Person, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, God become man. He alone is the still point in this turning world and the loving Center of our life. St. Paul so assured us when he wrote:

"I swear by God's truth that there is no 'Yes' and 'No' about what we say to you. However many the promises God made, the 'Yes' to all of them lies in Him the Son of God, Christ Jesus that we proclaimed among you. It is through Him we answer 'Amen' to the praise of God." 2 Cor. 1:18-20.

St. Paul was assuring us that all else may betray us, but Christ's love never fails. He is the only absolute in our lives.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart reminds us that we do need and do have personal love in our life. We are nobody until somebody loves and cares for us. Christ so loves us with all the warmth and feeling of His human heart. If we want to become someone and to experience God's personal love, then Jesus tells us, "Behold this Heart that has loved men so much."

We need a merciful love, not a demanding love we are afraid to approach. The pierced Heart of Christ tells us in language unmistakable that His love welcomes us as we are — though sinful and weak.

To the world of 1976 where love has grown cold and hatred seems to abound in human hearts, we need more than ever devotion to the Sacred Heart — to be reminded that His love is without frontiers and to be inspired to fulfill His new challenge "that you love one another as I have loved you."

As Pope Paul VI has remarked: "The glorious mystery of our Holy Church cannot be adequately understood unless the minds of men be directed towards the eternal love of the Incarnate Word, the shining symbol of which is His wounded Heart."

vatican news

Our Paschal Heritage

Following is the address of Pope Paul VI during the Vatican general audience of May 17.

Easter is such a feast, it is such an event that it obliges us, it invites us to prolong our meditation on it, and to integrate this paschal meditation into the mentality that must characterize Christian life. We must never again forget the paschal mystery! Let us meditate once more: now that Easter has been celebrated, what remains to us? The memory, the great memory? Yes, but not only the memory. There remains to us, as we have already said, baptism, which is the extension of the paschal mystery to our individual lives. It is a true, regenerating extension. We are no longer just human, mortal beings, we are Christians. St. Peter writes, in his second letter: Jesus Christ, in his divine power . . . has granted us the very great and precious promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.

We must meditate once more, always, on the paschal heritage, that is, the Christian heritage, that patrimony of goods, which came to us, unexpected and undeserved, from the fact of having become Christians by means of baptism, which communicated to us, in a supernatural but real way, the symbiosis. By this we mean the vital participation in the drama of Redemption, that is, of the death and resurrection of Christ. We repeat: we have become Christians, new creatures, divinized beings who, without losing anything of the natural perfection characteristic of man, in fact possessing it in greater fullness, holy and immaculate take, however, as the new foundation of life, even natural and present life,

religion, that is, the relationship with God, that relationship established by Christ, as a result of which we became God's adopted children, with all that ensues in the way of goods, hopes, dignity and the concept of life and of the world that springs from such a new reality.

If we wish to have an exact, though concise, concept of the fact that we are Christians, we cannot exclude a reference, now essential for our mentality, to this theology, to this "economy", that is, to this divine-human plan which fully concerns our salvation. Here, indeed, the divine plan, reflected in our historico-human experience, becomes a mystery; a mystery in itself because of the immense and profound truths which it offers to us to know and to contemplate, like a glance at the infinite sky; a mystery for us, because of the new, supernatural, let us even say surreal, order that it introduces into our ordinary and so-called real life.

We do not wish to conceal this transcendent, and therefore almost secret, aspect of Christian life. But we will guide our search along the level ways of the Gospel: level, so they seem, because they are made accessible to us by the simple, sublime words of Jesus the Master. Speaking of "paschal, or Christian heritage", it is easy for us to refer to the Lord's testamentary talks, at the Last Supper. They are talks that have the intention and the tone of someone about to pass from this life, and to leave to his faithful disciples the final and supreme memories. What did the Lord say in his awareness of his imminent passing beyond the bounds of present time? Oh! This excursion into the enchanted park of the revelations that gushed from Jesus' heart and lips in that paschal night could go on forever. Let us choose two reflections, which seem to us easier to set forth now, and in a certain sense to sum up the superlative form of life that Jesus recommends to us in the hour

when he takes leave of our temporal conversation.

You know these sweet and earnest words well, you who are accustomed to read the Gospel, and who direct your spiritual life towards the ineffable discovery of the Lord's heart. One concerns the community, ecclesial and social relationship that Jesus wishes to leave, before passing from this world, to his followers, in memory, as a continuation, as a perennial innovation of his evangelical school; the other concerns the personal, interior relationship of every faithful soul with that Jesus, who is about to take leave of our experimental and spiritual intimacy.

The first sounds like a commandment; it is the "new commandment": a very simple one, but as sublime as a mountain peak, always superior to our humble and courageous attempts to grasp it: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, that as I have loved you, you also love one another." Oh, that as! In it there lies the newness of the paschal commandment, its unattainable perfection, its inexhaustible energy! Who could ever equal it?

Then the second expression, words of vocation, words of predilection, words that penetrate the Upper Room of the heart, words that seem a question, and are a gift of incomparable interiority: "Abide in my love!" And this "abiding in love", who will make it his own? What, an initiation, what constancy, what sufficiency, what happiness it brings with it! To abide in strong and sincere love, extremely deep and extremely manly, content in itself and capable of every most virtuous effusion, is this the treasure, is this the paschal commitment?

Yes, this is the paschal heritage. Shall we be ready, shall we be faithful in making it our own? God grant that it may be so.

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