

Pastoral Perspective

June's Focus—The Sacred Heart of Jesus

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

People surrounded by affluence tend to assert their self-sufficiency and to ignore their dependency on Him Who is the unique source of all of our blessings.



When we wind up each day at the receiving end of the line with gifts lavished upon us in abundance, we seem to succumb easily to the temptation to adopt a 'ho-hum' attitude toward blessings. Many parents today prepare their children to be victims of their philosophy of life. Because of vivid memories of their own childhood when they had little of the goods of earth, adults have attempted to compensate by excessive giving to their children. They seem to be saying, "I will never let them endure the sacrifices I had to tolerate."

St. Augustine had a unique observation on our casual attitude towards blessings. He saw it as the Lord's motivation in performing the miraculous — to awaken us to an awareness of His constant Providence and Goodness which brings us blessings in abundance each day. When these gifts become common and every day happenings, we begin to take them for granted.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart began with a 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 in 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 1978 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."

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 arisen extremists who have interpreted the silence of 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 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.

May the celebration of the Feast of the Sacred Heart and the devotion sponsored by the Church in this month of June especially dedicated to the Heart of Christ bring all of us to a greater awareness of what St. Paul had in mind when he summed up the life of the faithful Christian in his oft repeated theme "In Christ Jesus."

The Press Gives Ecclesial Service

Following is the text of an address given by Pope Paul at a special audience with the Religious of the Congregation of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on May 22.

We are very grateful to the Superior General for the devoted words he has just addressed to us, expressing also the common sentiments of all of you present here, in the capacity of worthy members of the General Council and of diligent Representatives of all the Provinces and Regions of your well-deserving Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, at the moment when, in thanksgiving, it is celebrating the first centenary of its foundation.

Beloved sons, seeing you before us and thinking of the religious commitment which is specifically yours, we feel that hovering above you is the blessed spirit of the venerated Father Jean Leon Dehon, the inspired founder of your congregation; this latter, barely 100 years from its birth, is already operating in four continents.

Speaking to your 15th General Chapter 12 years ago, we exhorted you, as your superior general has just recalled, to remain faithful to the double assignment that distinguishes your congregation: faithfulness to devotion to the Sacred Heart — in whose name Father Dehon founded the institute and of whose cult he became an ardent apostle — and faithfulness to the genuine spirit of your specific apostolate.

Today's meeting wishes to be an ideal continuation of this important subject, to which we wish to add, even if fleetingly in view of the limited time at our disposal, some other considerations, as a sign of our fatherly affection and our fervent wishes for your future.

We take inspiration willingly from your founder to recommend to you in the first place faithfulness to his teaching and to his example, both of which were deeply marked by a special bond of filial attachment to Peter's Chair and to the Church. This entails, as you well know, faithfulness to the original charism, outpoured by the Holy Spirit on your congregation at its origin. It is expressed in an intense inner life nourished every day by prayer, worship and atoning oblation for the redemption of the world. You must, that is, be animated by a life-bringing spirituality, which aims at transforming you gradually into "living sacrifices" together with Christ. This is the specific testament of your founder and the precious heritage to be guarded jealously in order to draw from it the spiritual energies necessary for apostolic commitments and in order to cause to shine forth the true spirituality of the Dehonian religious, from which there must spring your indefatigable zeal to meet the most urgent needs of men.

Expressing to you our sincere appreciation for the various pastoral and missionary activities to which your congregation dedicates itself with such solicitude, we wish to say a special word about the apostolate of the press which, alongside the missionary, parish and social apostolate, occupies not a small part of your ecclesial service. We are deeply convinced of the great function of the Catholic press, which is of undeniable importance for the spread of Christian principles and for the defense of Catholic values, and so opportune for the formation of enlightened and authentic Christians.

We trust that in this sector, which has such an influence on society, a renewed commitment will be forthcoming on your part, at every level, to contribute more and more to the real good of souls and to the building up of the Church. We exhort you therefore to operate constantly in full conformity with the doctrinal and disciplinary orientations of the Church, dedicating yourselves with watchful and

loving care in order that the readers of your publications may be wisely formed to a genuine Christian sense and to the important requirements deriving from the Gospel message.

The celebrations promoted in the framework of your Jubilee year must be a propitious opportunity also to become more and more keenly aware of the responsibility and duties inherent in this delicate activity. Keep before your eyes the authoritative directives of the recent second Vatican Council, which asks that both the search for news and the publication of it should respect justice and charity and that "all members of society should help, through means of social communication, in the formation and diffusion of sound public opinion." So kindly pay heed to these requirements, evaluating not only the interest that a publication could arouse but also, and above all, the effects it might produce in hearts with regard to the increase of faith, to which your religious zeal calls you. Therefore neither opinions different from the "Sensus Ecclesiae," nor interests extraneous to the cause of the apostolate should ever prevail over the rectitude of your publishing service. In this way each of you will be able to repeat with St. Paul, himself a luminous example of a journalist, "I do it all for the sake of the Gospel."

In memory of this meeting, we wish to leave you a cordial invitation not to lose heart in the face of difficulties. Be confident! Christ is with you: it is he who has chosen you as his friends and as his heralds in the world. At the most exacting moments, know how to find refuge in his Heart, which is a sign and plenitude of the loving union between God and man. In this way you, "being rooted and grounded in love, will have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."