



Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 108 NO. 37 ■ THURSDAY, June 26, 1997 ■ 75¢ ■ 20 PAGES

Sacred Heart draws fervent devotees

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus can be rooted in Luke's story about Zacchaeus, according to Gloria Anson, director of the Sacred Heart Center in Syracuse.

"Listen, sir!" Zacchaeus told Jesus, who was visiting the home of the tax collector and sinner. "I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much."

Allowing Jesus to come into his home touched Zacchaeus' heart, Anson noted.

"His whole attitude changed," Anson said of Zacchaeus.

"Before, he cared about money, prestige. Now he wanted to be of service."

A modern-day apostle

For 23 years, Anson has promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, asking people to let the Lord's love come into their homes and hearts, as Zacchaeus did.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus entails reflecting on Christ's boundless and merciful love for humanity. That love is symbolized by his exposed heart — often portrayed with a torch or flames to represent the intensity of his love — and a crown of thorns to signify his Passion.

Devotees try to return Christ's love through prayer, good works and frequent Communion, Anson and other adherents said. They pointed to the promises Jesus reportedly made to devotees in a series of visions to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (see accompanying article, Page 14). The 17th-century saint was a French nun whose visions of Jesus and his Sacred Heart became well-known throughout Europe after her death in 1690.

Anson has long encouraged families to "enthron" a blessed image of the Sacred Heart, which means displaying a picture or statue of Jesus, with his heart exposed, in a prominent place in their homes.

"The gift of enthronement is an awareness of the presence of Jesus in the home," she said. "It's like making your home another tabernacle."

She urges families to gather in front of such domestic shrines for prayer as often as possible.

"I know that it's a survival kit for families today," she said of enthronement, which she has taught to

1,000 families. "In that central place in the home, you can share with the Lord your family problems, family joys."

She added that praying to the Sacred Heart can bring peace to families, not so much by magically erasing differences, as by changing inner attitudes of members toward one another.

"It's not about pictures, it's not about promises," she said. "It's about growing into an intimate relationship with our God."

Origins of the devotion

Although devotion to the Sacred Heart is most often associated with the visions of St. Margaret Mary, devotion to Christ's heart can be found in earlier centuries of the church. Such early devotion is noted in the 1989 book *Heart of the Redeemer*, authored by Dr. Timothy T. O'Donnell, president of

Christendom College in Arlington, Va.

Interest in Christ's heart began with early church devotion to the wound Jesus suffered in his side at the crucifixion, O'Donnell wrote. The blood and water that poured from that wound pointed to Christ's heart, he noted, and over the centuries the focus of the devotion gradually shifted to Christ's heart. Another reason for reflection on Christ's heart was the great love that early church members saw in St. John the Apostle for Jesus, he wrote.

In the Middle Ages, such saints as Bernard of Clairvaux and Catherine of Siena wrote movingly of how the suffering of Christ's heart signified his love for humanity, O'Donnell noted. In particular, St. Bernard (1070-1153) spoke openly of Christ's heart in such writings as his "Sermon on the Canticle of Canticles":

"The secret of (Christ's) Heart is laid bare in the wounds of his body. One can easily read in them the mystery of God's infinite goodness and merciful tenderness which came down to us like a dawning on high."

O'Donnell's book emphasizes that devotion to the Sacred Heart was "a gradual, unconscious development" in the church. Such religious orders as the Dominicans, the Carthusians and the Jesuits played a role in spreading the devotion, he wrote.

Continued on page 14

