

12th Sunday (A)

25th June 2023

‘Sweet Heart of Jesus’

Jer 20: I have committed my cause to you

Rom 5 ...

Mt 10:26–33: *do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul*

³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Mt 10).

In this month of June, these words of Jesus in today’s Gospel passage make me think of their close connection to our Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. *Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven,* says Jesus. We could place alongside that teaching of Jesus one of the 12 promises made to St Margaret Mary in the mid-1670s as Jesus encouraged through her the devotion to His Sacred Heart: *I will bless the houses in which the image of My Heart is exposed and honoured.* Yes, quite clearly Our Lord is saying to us, ‘publicly acknowledge Me,’ ‘make it known that you love Me,’ ‘show forth the adherence you have to Me.’

Let’s talk a bit more about this beautiful devotion to the Sacred Heart, which has become widespread in the

Church over the past 350yrs. St Margaret Mary Alacoque was a Visitation nun in central France, in Paray-le-Monial, in the 2nd half of the 17th c. Only a couple of years into her time in the convent — in her 20s — she started to receive visions of Our Lord, and messages. At first, as is common in such cases, her visions were treated with scepticism, and her sisters in the convent were unbelieving of her reports. But in due course, with support from her spiritual director, Jesuit priest St Claude de la Colombière, her claims were taken more seriously. The Church investigated them and authenticated them, deeming them to be genuine and worthy of belief. Her visions of Jesus concerned the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, including an image which has become very famous across the whole Church — Jesus’s heart on fire with love for us, yet crowned with thorns and wounded by our lack of love. The revelations to St Margaret Mary also included a number of promises and encouragements, especially with regard to First Fridays, which have become part and parcel of traditional Catholic culture hitherto. Since the mid-19th c. the Sacred

Heart has been a feast in the entire Church. In 2020 it was a century since the canonization of St Margaret Mary ... I rather presume that, sadly, that great anniversary in Paray-le-Monial passed without celebration, because of the pandemic.

On Trinity Sunday two weeks ago we considered how it is that God is three persons — “God is love”, says St John, and He is only “love” because He is a relationship of loving: the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit. He is entirely happy and complete in Himself, but He has chosen to share that love, by creating mankind, and by entering into this created world in order to reveal Himself to us. And it is in the Sacred Heart of Jesus — a heart that we can picture and deeply adore — that we come most tangibly close to the Divine Love which has made and redeemed the world. This is the majesty of this devotion: that the God of love has become man — and that in the human heart of Jesus resides all the passionate and perfect love of God for us. St Margaret Mary kindled devotion to Jesus’s Heart as symbolizing His love for mankind which is so often

rejected: a heart that burns for us, but is wounded by us ... that’s the meaning of the image of Jesus’s Sacred Heart on fire, but encircled by a crown of thorns.

The whole message of the Gospel is that to draw close to God who made us we need only to have access to Jesus, God incarnate. He has a true human heart which burns with love for us, yearns for our love for Him. And He is not distant: He has come to be with us, and abides for ever in His body, the Church. He calls repeatedly to sinners to come to Him, find forgiveness from Him, seek meaning and fulfilment from Him. All this is summed up in our approaching the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

So, during His apparitions to her, Our Blessed Lord gave to St. Margaret Mary various *promises* for those who are truly devoted to His Sacred Heart. Let me meditatively list them for you:

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will give 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 death.
5. I will pour abundant blessings on all their undertakings.

6. Sinners shall find in my Heart the source and 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 in which the image of my Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honoured.
10. I will give to priests the power to touch the most hardened hearts.
11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their name written in my Heart and it shall never 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 the Sacraments; my Heart shall be their assured refuge at that last hour.

This represents a powerful promise of blessing: and a great encouragement for us to honour and worship the Son of God as He has made Himself known to us.

See before your eyes that open heart: He above all others loves you and wants you. It's a gentle, gradual process, that the love of the Heart of Christ slowly transforms you into the Christian He wants of you, just as in the images of the Gospel the seed of the Kingdom grows slowly and surely, if we let it, by the sunshine of God's grace, and the watering of the Spirit. The promises of God

for those who love Him are huge: a promise of mercy; a promise of a holy death; a promise of life eternal in heaven; and we must do everything possible to ensure that we co-operate with the graces God gives. So, love and adore the Lord, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and especially think of honouring the Sacred Heart through coming to Mass on the first Friday of each month.

Back, then, to the image, the powerful image of the Sacred Heart, of which I have had many copies made for you. It is one which indeed we should all endeavour to have displayed in our homes/rooms. That promise, "*I will bless the houses where the image of My Heart is exposed and honoured,*" is a straightforward invitation from Jesus to acknowledge Him publicly, so I greatly urge you to do just that. The image is an attractive one, it draws the eye, and draws the heart ... And it should be visible in your room for friends and visitors to see, so that the Lord also can draw *them* to Himself. The Lord explicitly desires that we display our love for Him: not in an ostentatious way, but simply as an expression of our being His people. What

does He say to us in today's Gospel? "*Do not be afraid ... what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops!*" There's no need to keep the Good News to yourself! You're not meant to. Make it your heartfelt desire to love Jesus *openly* and honestly; to show Him to others; to let it be known that the driving force of your love as a Christian is from Jesus's intense love for you! What better or easier way than to have displayed, where you live, the image of the open heart of the Saviour? (Don't forget to take one!)

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be praised, ...

adored ...

and glorified ...

now and forever. Amen.