

June 13, 2010

On Friday of this weekend (June 11), the Church celebrates the Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Many Catholics express their personal devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by participating in Holy Mass and receiving Holy Communion on the First Friday of each month. Others say special prayers such as: “Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me” or “Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine.”

In the person of Jesus, we encounter our God who loves us so completely that He becomes like us in all things but sin. Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus extended the love and mercy of the Father to all whom He encountered, especially sinners, the sick, poor, and neglected.

When asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-40).

On the cross, Jesus expressed this commandment in more than words. He emptied Himself completely unto death so that we might be reconciled to God and one another and be able to share even in this life the life and love of God.

The Preface for the Mass of the Sacred Heart expresses how Jesus’ pierced heart is the ultimate sign of His love for us: “Lifted high on the cross, Christ gave His life for us, so much did He love us. From His wounded side flowed blood and water, the fountain of sacramental life in the Church. To His open heart the Savior invites all to draw water in joy from the springs of salvation.”

When the soldier pierced the heart of Jesus, blood and water flowed forth. From His heart, Jesus gave birth to the Church. The water symbolized the waters

of Baptism by which our sins are forgiven and we become members of His living Body, the Church. The blood flowing from Jesus' heart symbolizes the Eucharist, which Jesus gives as nourishment for our soul.

Indeed, greater love has no one, than that He lay down His life for His friends. Jesus suffered, died, and rose that we might have God's life and love in abundance. We become members of Jesus' living Body with the waters of Baptism that we might extend the presence and mission of Jesus in our time and place. Learning from Him to be meek and humble of heart, we give ourselves in self-giving love to others as Jesus gave Himself for us.

Our constant challenge is to learn from Jesus to empty ourselves of whatever might prevent us from recognizing our total dependence upon Him and recognizing His presence in others, especially those on the margins of life. In the wounded heart of Christ, we see the simple and eloquent beauty of God's love which stands in stark contrast to many of the values promoted every day in our society. In His heart, we contemplate the truth of love and the power of weakness and humility. In the face of that mystery, we begin to understand that living means dying to selfishness and sin and dying means living.

In contemplating the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we come to understand how deeply God loves us, desires us to respond to His love, and longs for us to share His love with others.

In the Opening Prayer for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, we pray: "Father, we rejoice in the gifts of love we have received from the heart of Jesus, your Son. Open our hearts to share His life and continue to bless us with His love."

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On Father's Day, next Sunday, we take a second collection to assist with the works of Catholic Charities in our diocese. In the last two years, the people in

our area who require assistance from Catholic Charities have multiplied and the resources of Catholic Charities continue to be very limited, even though it receives significant support from the Catholic Services Appeal.

Catholic Charities extends material, emotional, and psychological support for people in our diocese in ways that individual parishes are not able to do. Your generosity in next week's second collection is a concrete way to recognize Jesus in those who experience special needs and your way to extend the love of His Sacred Heart to them. Please be generous.