

# THE SACRED HEART: AN INFINITE TREASURE OF LOVE

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Well, today, we celebrate the beautiful solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the treasure of the Church, our consolation. And we can begin our meditation on this beautiful mystery of faith that gives all the faithful Christians such consolation. Using the option Number 2 of the Collect of the Mass of the Sacred Heart, we read and pray, “O God, who in the heart of your son, wounded by our sins, bestow on us in mercy the boundless treasures of your love. Grant, we pray, that in paying homage, paying him homage of our salvation, we may also offer worthy reparation.”

The practical takeaway of this feast is that we draw from these infinite treasures of love - this treasure of love, of forgiveness, of consolation, of peace and joy. In short, sanctity is for the taking and we can never exhaust it. We draw from his heart what Jesus revealed to the repentance our Samaritan woman, that from the heart of Jesus- we draw from the heart of Jesus this living water. Why is water an image? It's an image of the Holy Spirit, it's an image of this live-giving water, this special water, if you will, from the Sacred Heart that gives us total fulfillment and happiness that is perfected in the next life. And if we draw enough water, we ourselves will be transmitters of this water to those many hearts that are empty of meaning, empty of hope, empty of consolation. And so, we ourselves, participating in the treasures of Jesus' heart, we also distribute that water. We're not the source, but we draw from Jesus, and in turn, we give to others.

We can use a meditation on the Sacred Heart or a small part of a meditation on the Sacred Heart given by St. Josemaria - it can be found in *Christ is Passing By* titled *Finding Peace in the Heart of Christ*. St. Josemaria says the following, similar to what we prayed at the beginning of our meditation: “God our Father has seen fit to grant us in the heart of his son infinite treasures of love, mercy and affection. If we want to find evidence that God loves us, that he not only listens to our prayers but anticipates them, we need only follow the same line of thought as St. Paul, ‘He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us things in him- all things in him?’”

I am fortunate to drive along the Kennedy, it's a main highway in the city of Chicago. And as you drive south towards the downtown area, you will see on your right - make sure you keep your eyes on the road - but you'll see on your right a very big banner that everybody can see. There's a church along that highway - St. Stanislaus Kostka - and in front of that church, in the parking lot or courtyard, there is a banner of the Divine Mercy. And generous people have financed that beautiful, big banner, and I'm sure I could speak for most of the people involved with daily rush hour traffic, what a source of consolation is that banner, that

image of Divine Mercy with that wonderful hope-giving aspiration, *Jesus, I trust in you*. And it's almost as if we don't need an apparition. In fact, that painting, that image, comes from an apparition or a vision or a locution given to St. Sister Faustina in Poland in the 30s when she was having frequent visions, if not daily visions, of the Divine Mercy. And, it's almost as if the Lord is saying, reach out to me; come to me. I want you to trust me, seek me, and you will be abundantly satisfied. The waters of financial success, of professional prestige, of achievement, of good health, of attractive appearance, of power, of popularity are a water that never satisfies, leaves one thirsty. The water of that Sacred Heart called the grace of God, called the life of Christ, called an energy of love, fulfills and prompts the human heart to seek for more, and at the same time, fulfilling it.

We want to bring this beautiful truth, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to our daily life. We want to reflect on it and bring about some concrete practices that will allow us to benefit more from this too good to be true reality. In a way, you can summarize the entire gospel, if not the whole New Testament, with the celebrated traditional image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with Jesus pointing to his heart that is crowned with thorns. That is the icon, the image, that contains the entire gospel message - everything Jesus does, everything he says, his entire demeanor, in the gospel unpack this meaning of the Sacred Heart.

To give it a bit of contemporary history, if we have time, I will read some of the contents of St. Margaret Alacoque's vision of the Sacred Heart that gave a serious push to this devotion. But I want to touch on a more contemporary, private revelation that is meant for public consumption. As we celebrate Mercy Sunday, as we honor Sister Faustina, who is now St. Faustina, heavily endorsed by the great saint, the great evangelizer, the great Pope St. John Paul. She's having these visions of the Divine Mercy, and the Lord is heavily emphasizing more than ever, at least to my knowledge, and I think I'm probably correct, throughout the history of the Church we've always appreciated the Sacred Heart - this is a standard devotion, but it's gained momentum in the World War II years in Poland and the popes have cultivated this devotion, especially John Paul and Pope Francis. The immediate origin to the devotion of the Divine Mercy which is an offshoot of the Sacred Heart was the devastations of this virulent evil that resulted in a staggering toll in human death and human tragedy, human grief. And it was caused by a colossal rejection of the Sacred Heart. Not only was Jesus Christ and his teaching circumvented, he was hated and his teachings were hated by two regimes. This hatred of Christ was politicized and turned into a regime called Nazi Germany and communist Soviet Union, and also by extension, communist China. Systems that are directly predicated - explicitly predicated on a hatred of God, hatred of natural law that ultimately leads to Christ, leads to the heart of Christ. These two regimes are the radical antithesis of the meaning of the Sacred Heart.

In our modern times, I would say there is a soft implicit rejection of the Sacred Heart. The Sacred Heart is irrelevant. And by legislation and by actions, but we don't judge the human heart, we try to give people the benefit of the doubt, at least an objective sense with these severe, flagrant violations of fundamental principles of morality, it comes across as a blasphemy towards the Sacred Heart.

But let's look at the origin prayerfully. You have this saintly nun, sickly, wracked with pain, will die a young death. She is illuminated by visions of the Divine Mercy and messages from Jesus that we need to gravitate

more than ever on the most salient perfection of God made visible by the humanity of Jesus who is the Son of God made man, made human, made visible, made communicative. That's why he's called *word made flesh*. And these are times where we need to enter into that Heart of Jesus to find mercy. We're in desperate need of mercy. And the devastations of this culture of death that intensified in a frightening way during the second World War where 1/5th, at least according to my sources, of the Polish population perished, 1/3rd of clergy perished because of the concentration camps and martyrdoms.

In Germany, they were well over 2,000 priests and in Dachau alone. And then, from the other direction, from the Soviet Union, Poland also suffered terrible persecutions that would continue after- well after the second World War. And hence, under those horrible conditions, Jesus intervenes in a special way, that every Christian, even in these frightening and tragic circumstances, will find strength and energy and consolation in the Divine Mercy, that is the will of God that we focus especially on that part of the gospel. Pope Benedict, his frequent consideration, his frequent prayer, is to find recourse in the pierced heart of Christ. St. Josemaria would find consolation in Jesus' open side. He would enter into the open side, he would enter into one of his wounds, you know, I say in a metaphorical way, but not totally metaphorical. I mean, those wounds, that open side, is the culmination of God's revelation of how much we're worth to him.

What kind of sentiments should I have? Jesus says in the Gospel, "Come to me, all you who are- all you who are burdened and heavy laden, and you will find rest for your soul." Come to me. Matthew is the only one who records those words of Jesus. Obviously, Jesus' disciples heard those beautiful words. But, if I'm not mistaken, only Matthew records this. He's the only one who records about Jesus' teaching on feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, visiting the prisoner, visiting the sick. I'm paraphrasing... "If you did it for the least, you've done it for me." And obviously, I'm not anything near a Scripture scholar, but Matthew, who had a very checkered past, the tax collector was vis-a-vis the Jewish people, was a despicable character. He was seen very much as a trader. He was explicitly sinful. Then he'd go to the synagogue, extorted money, became impure because he hung around the Romans. The Romans were the oppressors, the enemy, and he worked for them, collected taxes for them. And he would extort money for himself. If they didn't pay up, he would hand them over to the Roman authorities. So, not exactly the most popular man on the block. He hung around other sinners - sinful, fraudulent, dishonest men, loose women, as was seen at his conversion party where the Pharisees were very much scandalized by Jesus showing up among such a motley crew of people eating and drinking with sinners.

And Jesus shows his human heart and his sacred heart. It is not the sick who need a- it is not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick. Learn from these words, Jesus says, "I want mercy and not sacrifice." And the gospel, as I said, those gospels- the gospels can be summarized with the image of the Sacred Heart. But we take Jesus literally, come to me. It's a gently word, *come*. It's not *get over here, you must come or else. If you know what good for you, do what I say*. No, it's *come to me*, and when you pray, unburden yourself.

For whatever it's worth, I- there's many churches in the- in Chicago and the metropolitan area that have Eucharistic adoration, either at certain times or at all times. And I give spiritual direction downtown Chicago, very close to a church where people who work downtown frequent for Mass, for confession, for

prayer. And at least on one of the afternoons, at least on Friday afternoon, there's Eucharistic adoration. And if I have a little bit of a break in the action and the work I'm doing - my confessions and spiritual direction - I'll make a visit or spend some time and adoration myself. And, I just notice people walking in. There's a bit of anxiety written on their faces. You realize if they're going to go in there and do some serious praying and adoring, and it's to give glory to God, but many times people have burdens and they're turning to God in desperation. And you can tell that there's issues weighing on them. And then, if I stay there long enough, I'll see people get up and leave. And as they leave, they're more refreshed, they're more lighthearted; they seem less anxious. Maybe my audience is saying, well are you looking at the Blessed Sacrament or observing the people coming in and out? And maybe I can answer, well, kind of both.

There's all sorts of wonderful anecdotes of drawing consolation from that Sacred Heart. And going back to that history that I digressed of Sister Faustina... John Paul was very much taken with the Divine Mercy being in the thick of things during World War II, losing his father, not the war, but he died as a- during the war. His- members of his faculty were executed, they closed the school, he worked in a quarry, and they started to destroy his country. Twenty miles away was Auschwitz, that famous hell of a concentration camp where people would enter but never come out. And he saw very clearly that the response of the evils of this world is to have recourse to the merciful Heart of Jesus. That love, and he liked to quote the Song of Songs, "Love is more powerful than death." And those words, for especially someone who experienced the culture of death at such close range, was packed with meaning. First, I have to find my strength in the Sacred Heart of Jesus to withstand the evils of the times, to bear my cross, to not give in to discouragement, to evangelize no matter what the circumstances are. I need to draw from that special water that wells up to eternal life, in that well of mercy called the Sacred Heart.

And John Paul, before he died, there was a book published. I think these are addresses he gave, remarks he gave over the years, called *Memory and Identity* where he does a lot of reflecting of his youth during the second World War and his time living in Poland under communist Soviet Union. And under no uncertain terms he says it's going to be the mercy of Christ that is going to triumph. We could say with Charles Dickens in his celebrated book *A Tale of Two Cities*, "These are the worst of times, these are the best of times." Why are they the best of times if they're the worst of times? Because these are times that call for an intense spirit of adoration, an intense recourse to the Sacred Heart.

So, Jesus is inviting us to pray a certain way. Let's follow the directions - these words will be intensified and become more poignant in the agony of the garden that Matthew narrates in detail. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Under no uncertain terms, come to me, unburden yourself to me, complain to me; tell me that you're weak, tell me that I need strength, tell me that temptations are too much right now, tell me that you're afraid of the Cross. Be very personal. Come to me. I want you to pray a certain way. I want you to open up to me. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

And what are we supposed to learn? Well, number one, how much we are loved by God. We can't know the love of God directly without the effects of his love. One, creation gives us a glimmer of God's love, but the revelation of his love is off the charts, if you will, with the humanity of Christ. Christ's humanity is the

absolute perfect human manifestation of God's love for us. John's first epistle defines God as agape - infinite, self-giving love - that's God. He doesn't love, he is love. Notice he's not defined by beauty or goodness. He's all those things. Not power, let alone the convoluted but valid proofs of the existence of God by the ancient pagan thinkers - Aristotle, Plato. An uncaused cause or the one or the good. But that simple one word, they didn't even come close. We don't fault them. They did pretty well without divine revelation. God is agape. And the perfect human translation of that transcendent love is the four gospels - Jesus' persona, Jesus' actions, Jesus' teachings.

What happens when we have recourse to the Sacred Heart? Allow me to read from the private revelation of St. Margaret of Alacoque, the 17th century French mystic. She says the following, "From this Divine Heart three streams flow endlessly. The first is the stream of mercy for sinners. It pours into their hearts sentiments of contrition and repentance." And when we have the misfortune of sin we will experience these sentiments of contrition and repentance, that's what happened to the gospel characters. The- the living water of Jesus' heart would flow into them, the Mary Magdalenes, the Zaccheuses, the Peters, the James, the Johns, the St. Pauls, the St. Augustines. Then she says, "The second is the stream of charity which helps all those in need and especially aids those seeking perfection to find the means of surmounting their difficulties." And hence, Jesus says here, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." That the Sacred Heart of Jesus helps us carry the cross, does most of the carrying, so much so that my yoke is easy and my burden is light. "From the third stream flow love and light for the benefit of his friends who have attained perfection. These he wishes to unite to himself so that they may share his knowledge and commandments, and in their individual ways, devote themselves wholly to advancing his glory."

Well, we bring our prayer to a conclusion and we go to the Immaculate Heart of Mary which is the feminine version of the Sacred Heart. She's perfectly Christ-like in feminine form. And we want to reach the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the shortcut, according to St. Josemaria and virtually all the saints, is the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We go to Mary and ask her to bring us into the depths of her son's Sacred Heart.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you've communicated to me in this meditation. I ask you help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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