

DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

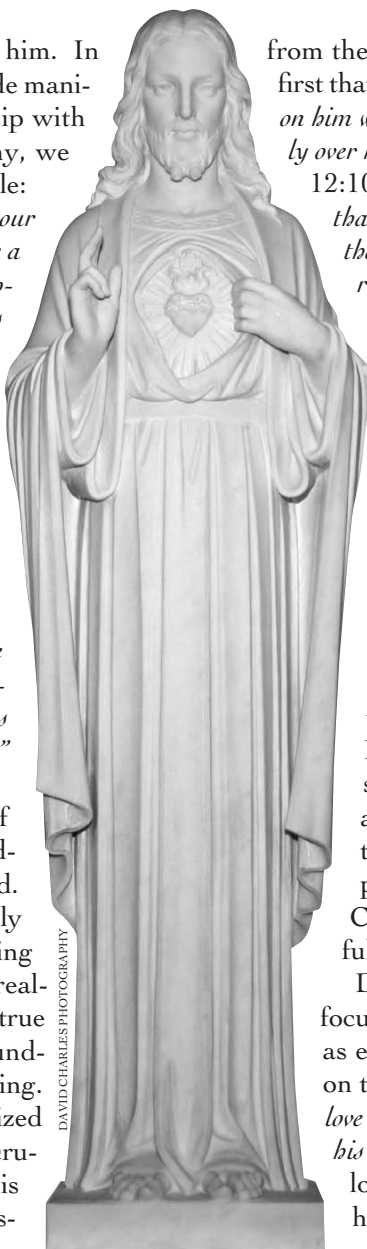
But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ~ John 19:34

GOD HAS ALWAYS LOVED mankind with a deep and abiding love. In the beginning, when Adam and Eve rejected God and doomed the human race to sin and death, we were not abandoned. God continued to call us back into a relationship with him. In the Old Testament, God's love was made manifest in his unique, covenant relationship with the People of Israel. In Deuteronomy, we read of God's love for his Chosen People:

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord has set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (Dt 7:6-9).

The greatest act of love on the part of God the Father for humanity is the sending of his Son Jesus Christ into the world. He assumed human nature and physically entered human history. In contemplating the life of Christ, we cannot help but realize how much we are loved. Indeed, as true God and true man, Jesus has a profoundly personal interest in every human being. His love for each of us is ultimately realized in his Passion and death. After he was crucified and died, a spear was thrust into his side, which pierced his very heart, caus-

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ing blood and water to flow forth. It is from this sacred event that the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus springs.

The most significant prophecy concerning the Sacred Heart comes to us from the prophet Zechariah. He prophesied first that the citizens of Jerusalem would *"look on him whom they have pierced"* and *"weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born"* (Zec 12:10). Zechariah then continues, *"[o]n that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness"* (Zec 13:1). This prophecy was fulfilled as Christ's side was opened, his heart was pierced, and the cleansing waters of forgiveness and blood of redemption poured forth.

The Church renders constant worship to the pierced heart of Jesus, which is an inexhaustible source of God's love and mercy for mankind. The heart of Jesus symbolizes Christ's love for us in a humanly understandable and appealing way. In the biblical sense, the heart represents the whole domain of our spiritual life. There is a connection between the physical heart and our deepest aspirations and affections. The heart of Christ, then, wonderfully signifies the fullness of his boundless love.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus focuses on the love of Christ for humanity, as evidenced in his sufferings and death on the cross. Jesus himself said, *"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (Jn 15:13). Jesus loved each of us so immeasurably that he suffered and died in order to restore

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us back to grace and friendship with God. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is a marvelous way that we sinners can respond to the unfathomable love of Christ.

What are the essential elements of the devotion? We must first offer a generous return of love to Jesus by making wholehearted acts of love to him. Second, the world has responded to the love of God with such indifference and cruelty that it is also important to beg pardon for humanity’s rejection of the Lord. By frequent prayer and acts of penance and charity, we can help redress the harm done by the outrages that have been committed by ourselves and all people against divine love.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart has been lovingly offered by Catholics for almost a thousand years. With the help of divine grace, the devotion developed from its foundations in Scripture and Catholic teaching. The devotion is so intimately united with the Catholic faith that popes have referred to it as “the summary of the whole mystery of redemption” and as “the highest expression of the Catholic religion.” The Feast of the Sacred Heart is celebrated on the Friday after the second Sunday after Pentecost.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart has special primacy over all other devotions. The Church has given it her most exalted seal of approval, referring to it as a divine gift to the Church from the Lord himself. In fact, the devotion so perfectly illustrates the truths of the Catholic faith that it must be cherished by all the Catholic faithful. The Church warns the faithful against indifference toward such a “priceless gift.”

The devotion to the Sacred Heart has enriched and strengthened the faith of many Christians over



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At prayer: a sister of the Missionary Catechists of St. Thérèse of the Infant Jesus (MCST), founded in the Philippines in 1958

the centuries. But it is clear that humanity has forgotten the suffering love of the Savior and is in danger of losing its very soul. With a sense of urgency, the successors of St. Peter, the popes, have spoken of the devotion to the Sacred Heart as the “extraordinary remedy for the extraordinary needs of our time.” We must turn to Christ and consider once more the fountain of mercy and forgiveness that flows from his Sacred Heart. We must realize again how intensely our Savior loves us. Only then will society be transformed into a civilization of love, resting on the solid foundation of the peace and justice of Christ. The Church heralds the Sacred Heart as the source of the fire of divine love which alone can save the human race and secure the victory of charity.

(CCC 478, 2669)