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New Friends for the Sacred Heart

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

A few years ago I noticed something interesting as I gathered information for a Sacred Heart talk. I was researching some French history and picked up a book written by an historian who wrote on the impact the Sacred Heart had on the country of France. The book cited numerous occasions when the spirituality of the Sacred Heart took hold of the consciousness of the French populace, yet at the very end of the book, when I was expecting the author to give a very positive evaluation of the influence of the devotion, he predicted that there was not much hope for its future. His final sentences summarized his conclusion: "Two hundred years after the Sacred Heart had appeared to Marguerite-Marie Alacoque, the "chapel" was well underway. But as the basilica of the Sacre-Coeur (of Montmartre) rose over the Parisian skyline, things were not getting better for the friends of the Sacred Heart. They were getting worse" {from *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart* by Raymond Jonas, University of California Press, 2000, p. 141}.

To be sure, things have not always gone favorably for the Sacred Heart. Many setbacks came before the devotion was put on the universal Church's calendar; many years passed before the Church officially recognized the authenticity of the revelations of St. Margaret Mary. The Jansenists tried to tarnish the devotion by calling its devotees "heart worshippers," implying that it was a form of idolatry to single out the heart of Jesus and "sentimentalize" his love for all humankind. They questioned why Jesus would show any preference to our "sin-stained humanity" by his exaggerated proofs of love given to an unknown nun. Who could believe that God really cared so much as to let his divine essence appear as a burning furnace in order to demonstrate his excessive love for us? Yet this is exactly what occurred; what the entire Catholic Church now accepts as truth: that the heart of God loves his people passionately! But after these ardent "protests" of love made during the revelations of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary, a very sad confession also emerges: very few seem interested in God's love. We are left with the unbelievable lament from the Sacred Heart that he feels rejected, unloved in return, needing new friends, faithful friends who will give him the honor of their presence and the warmth of their hearts. Perhaps this is what the final words of the above quoted writer alluded to when he ended his book by saying, "things were not getting better for the friends of the Sacred Heart." But is it really so? Has the Sacred Heart receded from our spiritual view because no one is concerned about returning his love and friendship?

The tainted thinking of Jansenism might have us believe so. However, our basic Catholic teaching on the Eucharist would have us recall that this sacrament is intimately linked to the heart of our Savior; actually originating from Jesus' pierced side, as represented by his flow of blood. Our understanding of the transubstantiation of the bread and wine we receive at communion is that we are really receiving the actual body and blood of Christ, not as a mere sign, but as a true reality. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the Sacred Heart is the Holy Eucharist, and furthermore, Christ's sacred heart is truly present in the Eucharist. It is no accident that the feast of the Sacred Heart comes within the octave of Corpus Christi, underscoring the unbreakable link between these two great solemnities in the Church.

Perhaps if we review the main contents of the revelations given to St. Margaret Mary we shall see the clear

relationship between the Eucharist and the heart of Christ. Beginning with the first revelation on the feast of St. John the Evangelist, December 27, 1673, some salient features can be noted: 1) St. Margaret Mary was before the Blessed Sacrament in a state of deep recollection; 2) she experienced herself leaning against Christ's sacred heart; 3) Christ proclaimed his passionate love of the human race; 4) He desired to enrich mankind with precious treasures and graces of sanctification; 5) Christ had a spiritual exchange of hearts with St. Margaret Mary and gives her a new name: beloved disciple of his Sacred Heart. In the second and third revelations of 1674 (of which no specific dates are given) St. Margaret Mary recorded the following: 1) again, the Blessed Sacrament was exposed; 2) Christ's wounds shone like five stars; 3) He revealed his pure love for mankind; 4) He complained of receiving in return, only ingratitude and indifference...coldness and dislike; 5) He looked for those who would "make up" for all this neglect; 6) He requested that He be received in the Eucharist as often as possible; 7) He desired that "mortifications" be regarded as "tokens of love;" 8) He requested that communion be received on the First Friday of each month; 9) and that a Holy Hour be made in honor of his agony; 10) He cautioned against believing every inspiration; 11) He recommended the importance of getting spiritual guidance. Finally, in what has become known as the "Great Revelation" of June 1675, we find these emphases: 1) It occurred during the octave of Corpus Christi; 2) St. Margaret Mary received the revelation kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament; 3) Jesus disclosed his Heart; 4) Jesus lamented the scant appreciation he receives, especially from hearts dedicated to his service; 5) He requested that the Friday after Corpus Christi be a special feast in honor of his Heart; 6) He also requested on this feast the reception of Holy Communion and a solemn act of reparation for the indignities He has received in the Blessed Sacrament while exposed on the altars of the world. It is interesting to quote St. Margaret Mary's direct words from this revelation, as she relates them from the lips of Christ: "I promise you, too, that I shall open my Heart to all who honor me in this way, and who get others to do the same; they will feel in all its fullness the power of my love."

It is good to be reminded of these important points from the Sacred Heart revelations to Saint Margaret Mary, as we celebrate the 340th anniversary of the "Great Revelation" this month of June. Significantly, that request made by Christ to "get others to honor his divine heart" might impel us to renew our own devotion so that we can become channels to reach out to the next generation of disciples. Unlike the pessimists who do not predict a future for the Sacred Heart devotion, we place our trust in the promises of Christ, who has touched countless hearts with his burning love and converted them to the messages given at Paray-le-Monial. If you visit the website of the Sanctuary of Paray-le-Monial you will see encouraging news of the present day efforts to invite families and individuals to consecrate themselves to the Sacred Heart. (And do not miss the beautiful video presentation of *The Future Belongs to Mercy*).

If we truly wish to show our esteem for the Sacred Heart, honoring this anniversary month of the "Great Revelation," perhaps we can spend time this week before the Blessed Sacrament and recall with thankfulness the sacrifices that proved Christ's love for the world, particularly his trustful surrender to his Father's will and his spirit of forgiveness toward those who hurt him. And let us be especially attentive to reverence the true presence of the Lord in the Eucharist which symbolizes the nourishment we need to remain close to the Lord's heart as his beloved friends.

The Sacred Heart wants to be an essential part of our daily lives through all of the developments that unfold in them. He wants to assure us that there is a great gift waiting for us: his divine intimacy which will accompany us in every event that comes our way. He wants to "divinize" the details of our day by giving us a keener awareness of what it is that will spiritually enrich us. He does not stop seeking us through the unexpected graces that he sends our way, as his mercy reaches out to our needy souls. He is a relentless lover and despite his laments of forsakenness, he perseveres in the quest for deeper bonds of communion with his people. He asks his friends to cleanse their souls and to approach him in the sacrament of the Eucharist which is the meeting place of his love and mercy. Above all, he does not force his love on anyone but draws our restless hearts through an interior understanding that he is the source of all true happiness in this world and the next. He desires our friendship and invites us to bring others into the orbit of his love.

Pilgrims entering the chapel of Paray-le-Monial will immediately be aware of the large fresco-like painting above the main altar portraying the person of Christ, his wounds shining like stars, and looking upon a kneeling Saint in prayer. Both Christ and Margaret Mary are surrounded by an array of special friends, making it apparent that there are true lovers of the Sacred Heart devotion. Perhaps we too can place ourselves and our friends among this illustrious group, at least in spirit, and ask for the grace to honor and adore the Heart of Christ, who has given us the precious gift of his body and blood. +

This talk on Sacred Heart spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on June 7th, 2015. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the Sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, August 2nd, 2015 at 4:00 p.m.