

Feast of the Sacred Heart

June 23, 2017

On 25th August 1856, Blessed Pope Pius IX inscribed the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart in the Calendar of the Catholic Church, directing that it be celebrated on the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi (the Body of Christ) each year. He was responding to a formal request made by Jesus Himself almost two centuries earlier in 1675 to a French Visitation nun, Margaret Mary Alacoque. This saintly woman was later to be canonised on May 13th, 1920, just five days before the birth of St. John Paul II, who, towards the end of his great Pontificate would nominate the Feast of the Sacred Heart a special Day of Prayer for Priests.

Jesus expressed His wish that the Feast of the Sacred Heart be a day of reparation, not for sins in general, but specifically for sins against the Eucharist.

In her autobiography, written reluctantly under obedience, St Margaret Mary tells us in some detail what exactly happened on that day in June 1675. Part of what she wrote down, are the Lord's words to her in relation to his sacred heart:

“Behold this Heart, Which has loved men and women so much, that It has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify to them Its love; and in return I receive from the greater number nothing but ingratitude by reason of their irreverence and sacrileges, and by the coldness and contempt which they show Me in this Sacrament of Love. But what I feel most keenly is that it is hearts which are consecrated to Me, that treat Me thus. Therefore I ask of you that the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi be set apart for a special day to honour My Heart, by communicating on that day and making reparation to It by a solemn act, in order to make amends for the indignities which It has received during the time It has been exposed on the altars. I promise you that My Heart shall expand Itself to shed in abundance the influence of Its divine love upon those who shall thus honour It, and cause It to be honoured.”

Notice two things in this word from the Lord Jesus to St. Margaret Mary. The first is a word of reprimand, directed especially towards those priests who abused the trust given them to lead in the veneration and adoration of the precious body and blood of the Lord Jesus. The second thing the Lord says to St. Margaret Mary is a word of promise, whereby he promises to expand the influence of his heart upon those who truly honour the Sacrament of the Altar.

This day is one where we are called to consider the following question:

How to I approach the Sacred Heart of Jesus as He comes to us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist?

Then in turn we are to ask: Do I really ponder with deep gratitude, that like the Israelite's who were chosen because of God's love for them, what it means for me to be chosen to participate in this great sacrament? Do I hear with the conviction that comes to us from St. John's 1st Letter

that my participation in this Sacrament calls me to embody in my life that quality of love radiating from the Sacred Heart of Jesus? As St John says:

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

How hard it is to love like this unless we see that Jesus issues to us every time we come to this altar the invitation:

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

How do we discover this rest? As we say with gratitude Jesus I love your Sacred Heart and desire to honour your heart by how I live in relation to you and others. I am discovering ever more fully the extent of your love for me. And there is nothing I want more than to revere you and live from the centre of Love which is your Sacred Heart. Continue to convert my heart to yours so that my life will radiate more fully that love which I can only give when yoked to your heart of love.