

**“Come, let us adore the Heart of Jesus wounded for love of us.”**

*Invitatory Psalm*

On Friday, the Catholic Church throughout the world celebrated the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, falling, as it does, a week and a day after the feast of Corpus Christi. Devotion to the Sacred Heart was given new life in the seventeenth century by St Margaret Mary Alacoque and her priest Confessor, St Claude de la Columbière. But the devotion itself predates that by many hundreds of years. For example, there is a lovely book of devotions written by a whole group of Carthusian monks dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

But what is the Sacred Heart of Jesus? What do we mean when we say we have a devotion to Our Lord’s Sacred Heart?

Even amongst the feast days of the Church, the liturgy of the Sacred Heart is especially rich in symbolism and meaning, but in the end all of the imagery reveals just one thing, namely the profound love of the Son of God Incarnate for the sinful members of a fallen race. The Sacred Heart is the image we most associate with a love that knows no bounds. Whatever our sins – and they are many and grievous – and whatever our state in life, Our Lord rendered Himself vulnerable, and allowed His Heart to be pierced by the lance of a Roman soldier, so that we might not suffer what would otherwise have been the permanent consequences of our sins – that is, the abandonment of hell – but could, at the end of our lives on earth, join Him in heaven instead.

In pouring out such unmeasured love, He could not be the winner by His actions insofar as He had nothing to gain personally... except the prospect of our company in heaven for all eternity.

How many of us would lay down our lives in such wretched torment for those we love? Perhaps we might, for those we *really* love. But for those whom we do not even know? For those who have deliberately and wantonly wounded us again and again through their own pride, selfishness, or indifference?

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This is what the feast of the Sacred Heart is all about: not so much the consolation we can derive from the gifts Our Lord pours out upon us – although, goodness knows, what He gives us is infinitely greater than anything we can give Him – but, rather, the adoration that we give to Him in return for the love that He has shown for us. The feast of the Sacred Heart – as indeed all the feast days of the Church, and every single Mass we ever come to – is about *our* giving to *Him*. We come to Mass to adore the Heart that was wounded for our sakes. We come to kneel before Him in homage, and to adore the living God who made us, who saved us from our sins, who sanctifies us and makes us holy, and who, alone, is able to grant us eternal salvation.

Today is First Holy Communion day in our parish. Several of our young people will receive Our Blessed Lord into their hearts for the very first time in Holy Communion. They will kneel at the altar rails, and make a throne of their hearts, and welcome their King and Saviour into their souls. But although, as we have said, Our Lord gives us so much more than we can ever give Him, nonetheless receiving Holy Communion is also an act of giving on our part. When we go to Holy Communion, we give our hearts to Our Lord so that He can make His dwelling place within us, and take up His abode in our hearts and minds.

He longs to come into our hearts far more than we long for Him. He thirsts for our love far more than our feeble hearts thirst for His love. But In Holy Communion,

we have the chance to lay open our hearts as He laid open His Sacred Heart on the Cross, and to present to Him a heart cleansed of sin in the Sacrament of Confession, so that He may rule our hearts and minds, as He ruled the whole world from the Tree on Calvary.

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These are the opening words of the Divine Office, prayed by priests and monks and nuns around the world, on the feast of the Sacred Heart. They are repeated at the end of each verse of Psalm 94, the first prayer of the day:

*Cor Iesu, amore nostri vulneratum: Venite adoremus.*

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On this First Holy Communion day, in this month of June, the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we are summoned by His love, and compelled by the urgency of His desire for our salvation, to kneel in adoration before the God who made us, and to open our hearts to Him that we might find in His Heart the refreshing and life-giving waters of salvation.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part.

But what I can, I give Him, give my heart.