

# Looking

## FOR PEACE OF MIND?

### TURN TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

Christmas brings many memories. One which I will never forget occurred when I was a lay person living in western Pennsylvania. After Mass on Christmas morning, I waited to greet the priest who said Mass and wish him a Merry Christmas. This priest was also my spiritual director at the time. As we were conversing at the top of the church steps, a woman passed by on the sidewalk below. She seemed to be a poor person as reflected by her appearance. She passed by lamenting over and over again, "My canary died, woe is me; My canary died." Her complaint was so heartfelt that one could feel that she just lost a best friend, probably a pet who kept her company amid a lonely existence. Here it was Christmas day and she was obviously agitated and in distress and most likely without any consolation. This memory stays with me because there are many, many people out there who have no one to turn to on this great feast of Christmas. They are devoid of peace in a season filled with the reminders of peace.

In this season of Advent and Christmas, the Church's liturgy resounds with the theme of peace as we await the Prince of Peace—Our Lord Jesus Christ. If you're familiar with the liturgical readings for this time of year, you'll naturally see that this emphasis on peace is very predominate... "Then," Isaiah (65:25ff) comments, "the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest..." You get the picture. It's an idyllic image of what the earth can be like when God's kingdom reigns. We only have to open our eyes and look around, read the news, take stock of our families or communities to see that this wonderful peace does not yet exist here on planet earth. However, it does exist in some isolated pockets on the face of the earth and in some human hearts which tell us that such deep peace is possible. How and where do we find it? How can we capture some for our own individual lives?

As Christmas approaches, I often think about the celestial greeting the simple shepherds received on the night of Christ's birth. One translation gives it this way: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace to those with whom God is pleased" (Lk 2:14). Or as the more traditional translation reads, "peace to men of goodwill." So this heavenly peace is offered to those of goodwill, with whom the Lord is pleased. This is the peace of Christ—so different from the superficial peace of the world which is fragile and easily broken by any false moves. The peace of Christ is something radically different. It is that durable, lasting, steady peace that withstands chaos, contradiction and conflict. Oh, that we could lay our hands on this peace. Aren't we all longing for this kind of inner peace? Yet, we look for it in all the wrong places. And we hope to find it according to our own desires and agendas.

I would like to propose today that the place to find this magnificent peace of mind and heart that we all want to possess is in the Heart of Jesus. Catholic tradition has long pointed to this concept. In 1899 Pope Leo XIII approved for public use the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This litany is a synthesis of 33 invocations to the Heart of Jesus composed by St. Margaret Mary's friend and confessor Fr. Croiset, S.J. and two Visitation Nuns—Sister Madeleine Joly of Dijon in 1686 and Sister Anne Madeleine Remuzat in 1718. In it we find the Heart of Jesus petitioned as our peace and reconciliation. This is because the Heart of our Redeemer is the tangible sign of his invincible love for us and the inexhaustible source of true peace. Recall that the letter to the Ephesians (2:14) refers to Jesus with the words, "He is our peace." Therefore, it is the Lord Jesus who is the one who can implant that abiding peace in hearts that are so confused and conflicted today. Clearly, in Jesus' own words we find this assurance. He tells us plainly when speaking in the Upper Room before his suffering and death, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give it to you (Jn 14:27). The world understands peace primarily on the temporal and external level, but the peace of Christ springs from the supernatural order—it is the result of putting God first in our lives and doing his will.

In a speech given in 1999 for the occasion of the beatification of the Polish priest and martyr Stefan Frelichowski, Pope St. John Paul II begins his address with the words, "We bow in faith before the great mystery of the love of the Divine Heart and we give it honor and glory. Hail, O Jesus, Hail, O Heart Divine of the Son of Man, which has so loved men and women." Then he says, "Dear Brothers and Sisters, without inner renewal and without commitment to overcome evil and sin in our hearts and especially without love, we will never achieve inner peace. *Such peace will be lasting only when it is rooted in the highest values, when it is based on moral norms and is open to God.* Otherwise, when built on the shifting sands of religious indifference and arid pragmatism, it can only be short-lived. Inner peace comes to birth in the human heart and in the life of society as a result of moral order, ethical order, the observance of God's commandments."

There it is, so nicely put. But do these thoughts of our saintly pontiff John Paul II really reflect what goes on in human hearts? Well, here is a true story about a young woman whose life totally changed as she opened herself up to God and started to live by God's commandments. This story is recounted in the book entitled *Full of Grace*, compiled by Christine Watkins. The author of this story—Angela—begins her narrative by simply saying, "My sinful life started early." In a very forthright style, Angela relates how she copied the behaviors of her friends as she was growing up. In her teens she started to date and by sixteen was pregnant. An abortion quickly followed because she didn't want to have a kid. Raised a Greek Orthodox, her family never went to church and Angela admits, "I knew nothing about God, Jesus, or the Blessed Mother." Eventually her parents broke up and after her father left home, Angela started to live a more profligate lifestyle. She began working at a nightclub in Massachusetts and was hired to do stripping acts three nights a week which earned her \$1,500. Her mother was horrified to find out what she was doing, but Angela in retaliation moved out and bought another house. She says, "The only happiness in my life was my work, because I got to dress up, look beautiful and act sexy, while money and attention were thrown at me like candy." On Wednesday, June 7, as she was getting ready for work, an inexplicable force or feeling "like a wall" came over her. She couldn't do anything and kept repeating, "God won't let me go to work today." She was concerned about losing the money but thought she'd make it up the next day. But when it came, the feeling only grew stronger. This time she sensed God wanted her to quit her job. She was crying hysterically but the feeling only grew. By Saturday, she felt God wanted her to stop taking birth control pills. She says, "At this time in my life, I started getting a sense of God's desires and whatever I sensed, I said, and then did." So she called her boss and quit her job. She was feeling miserable and confused. But she decided to go back to church, and began to dress more conservatively, to fast and to live a better moral life. Two months after her conversion, she resolved to become a Catholic. Then a trip to Medjugorje instilled in her a deep love of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Angela's spiritual life kept developing. She says, "Even though I often looked at a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and told Jesus I loved him, I didn't feel anything like love." But during a Crusillo weekend, Jesus caught her attention by physically tapping her on the shoulder. She writes, "In my heart, I heard him say, 'You know how you think about your boyfriend all the time? You know the love that you have for him, the way you always want to please him, make him happy, do nice things for him? I want you to love me that way.'" Then it hit her how Jesus died on the cross for her and her eyes were opened to see how much he loved her and how much he loves us all. She continues, "And the peace that he always said he'd give... I felt that peace. Jesus healed my hardened heart and I responded with great love." Now Angela declares to Jesus, "I will do anything you ask of me. I surrender my will to you." Drawing ever closer to her Lord, Angela now wants so much for others to know God even if it means she has to suffer for them. She responds, "So be it. I'll be single, married, a nun. I'll do whatever God wants." Her prayer life has expanded exponentially. She concludes, "Since my conversion, I walk out of the house and say, 'Ahhh, I have nothing to worry about. God is with me.'"

We all, if we desire it, can find the enduring peace we aspire to in the Heart of Jesus. Saint Margaret Mary herself knew this from her own experiences. As a consummate spiritual guide she often advised her correspondents to turn to the Heart of Jesus to find his promised serenity even in the midst of their predicaments. To one she writes, "Refer everything to His Glory. Set up your abode in this loving Heart of Jesus and you will there find lasting peace and the strength both to bring to fruition all the good desires He inspires in you..." To another she writes, "Whenever the enemy (the devil) incites you to worry and stirs up interior storms in you, go to the Sacred Heart and seek your peace there by making acts of love and abandonment, without even bothering to pay any attention to what is taking place in you."

So this is the secret to that peace of mind and heart for all of us who worry and fret over life's problems. Like Angela in the story above, we need to develop an interior disposition that wants to put the will of God first in our lives. Deeply spiritual people recognize that happiness and peace of soul come with our abandonment to God's will. They assure us that it is the straight path leading most quickly and surely to a profound unearthly peace. Union of our created will with the divine will makes for unalterable peace.

In this beautiful season of the year as we prepare for the birth of Christ, so may obligations vie for our time and attention. We may experience a spiritual restlessness as we try to accomplish too many projects and activities. We may feel overwhelmed and driven to get them all done and can easily lose our focus and peace. Inner turmoil sets in as a plethora of tasks loom before us. This is when we need to create pockets of prayer and silence—even short minute reminders that God is near us and that his Sacred Heart loves us and has created us for something higher and better. May his peace descend on all of us and transform us, like Angela, into his dearest companions and ardent disciples. With that spirit, we can bring to our world God's Kingdom and the reign of his Sacred Heart in the New Year. +

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*This talk on Sacred Heart spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on December 4<sup>th</sup> 2016. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the Sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at 4:00 p.m.*