

Repairing WRONGDOING Our DUTY to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

One of the customs that we have here in our monastery is to take a turn for a week at a time in the kitchen. Every Saturday afternoon, the list of new charges for the coming week is read out, and one of these is for a “kitchen Sister.” If a Sister is able to assume this charge—no experience needed—then she is responsible for helping to prepare certain meals. I must say that prior to coming to the monastery, I had little culinary experience to rely on. But like it or not, I had to take my turn. It was either sink or swim, and I did not want to mortify our Sisters more than necessary. In my inexperience I happened to puncture a quarter-sized hole in the top of a brand new, and very nice, storage container. Every time I saw it at the dishes or in the kitchen, I deeply wished that that hole would somehow disappear. One day, Sr. Anne Marguerite, who was in charge of food at that time, had it in her hand. I was standing across the kitchen table from her and intensely felt a pang of regret serge through me. Mischievously she held up the lid and put it to her eye, peering through the hole at me with a grin. I responded with a quote from the Psalms (51:3) that broke the ice, “My sin is always before me,” I said.

There are very few human beings who have never made mistakes in their lifetimes. We are all tempted to do things that are not according to God’s standards. And we all certainly like to have our own way, sometimes even hardening our hearts or justifying our misguided actions or downplaying our responsibilities. This willfulness to break from or ignore what God wants can lead us to a sort of inner rebellion and even to sin. Our selfish tendencies often take priority over God’s will. To get back into God’s good graces, the Church asks us to confess our sins, that is, to admit our wrongdoing before God and to make amends for it.

Now, many people today deny that they have sinned or are sinning. Some have deliberately distorted their perception of sin, believing that they can do just as they please and still remain a “good” person. This state, I believe, is very prevalent in our world today and exists in almost every profession, including those within the Church. Forces of evil are very skillful in subtly convincing us that our actions are acceptable, even when our motives have not been all that honest or pure and even when they clearly contradict the commandments of God. I just read an article about the Church in Argentina (written by an Argentinian) who complained about the widespread deterioration among its churchmen and in its seminaries. So we are all susceptible to a kind of spiritual fog that keeps us from genuinely seeing our faults and failings that we glibly accept as part and parcel of our existence. Yet, if we want to live a true Christian life that brings us closer to the Heart of Christ, we are called—all of us—to look deeply into our interior and weed out those stubborn weaknesses that stifle our spiritual development. In other words, we are all called to repentance and to reparation—to acknowledge our sins before God, to be sorry for them and to repair the damage we have done to the best of our ability.

This may be quite a challenge for some of us (maybe for most of us), because we just do not like to admit that we may have been in the wrong or have harbored the attitude that we cannot go astray or be an example who leads others astray. It takes real humility not to justify ourselves in these conditions, which we usually excuse ourselves from under some pretext. Don’t we all have the propensity to wiggle ourselves out of any blame for our careless and refractory behaviors?

The question I want to ask is this: Can our apathy towards God’s love and commandments really hurt the Heart of Jesus? If we pay attention to the messages of St. Margaret Mary we can find out the answer. In her *Autobiography* we read that the Lord appeared to her and revealed “the indescribable wonders of his pure love for mankind.” We can only imagine what these “indescribable wonders” are like, because Margaret Mary has no human words that do justice to this kind of love. We read how the Lord emphasizes that the extravagance of this love is for everyone, even for those who have nothing but ingratitude and indifference toward him. Then Jesus laments to our saint the painful truth. He says that, “This hurts me more than everything I suffered in my

passion. Even a little love from them in return," he expresses, "and I should regard all that I have done for them as next to nothing and look for a way of doing still more. But no, all my eager efforts for their welfare meet with nothing but coldness and dislike. Do me the kindness, then of making up for all their ingratitude, as far as you can."

As devotees of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, this is a significant part of our mission. If we are really the friends and disciples of Jesus' loving heart, then we are called to make up, as far as we can, for all the ingratitude and coldness we have shown to the Lord in our lifetimes and that the world has for the loving, merciful Heart of Jesus. This is a tall order. If we respond to it in the best way we can, we can be assured of the treasures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and eternal happiness beyond comprehension.

Since it is February, a month that we devote to some reflections on the saints who had particular devotion to the Sacred Heart, I'd like to mention in this presentation a twentieth-century pope who wrote an important encyclical on reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This encyclical entitled *Miserenissimus Redemptor (Most Merciful Redeemer)* was promulgated on May 8, 1928 by Pope Pius XI. Among the popes of the twentieth-century who form a star-studded array of upright and faith-filled men, Pius XI has a somewhat obscure profile. His brightness may be partly eclipsed by the more well-known pontiff of his successor Pius XII whose long reign in office (1939-1958) ranged over the tumultuous years of World War II and its aftermath. Reading the life of Pius XI, however, leads one to episodes that, in my estimation, make good material for a suspense thriller.

An overview of the life of Pius XI is, therefore, in order. He was born Achille Ratti in 1857, son of a wealthy owner of a silk factory in the Milan province of Italy. A gifted student and acclaimed mountain climber, Ratti entered the priesthood and eventually obtained three doctorates, in philosophy, canon law and theology, pursuing an academic career. His specialty was as an expert in the study of ancient and medieval Church manuscripts. At the invitation of Pope Pius X, he became vice-prefect of the Vatican Library and then prefect. In 1918, Pope Benedict XV asked him to leave the library and take up diplomatic service as an apostolic visitor and then as papal nuncio with the title of archbishop. Without any maneuvering to obtain these positions, Ratti soon found himself named Archbishop of Milan and made a Cardinal by Benedict XV. The Pope joked with him saying, "Well, today I give you the red hat, but soon it will be a white one for you." His words proved prophetic. Pope Benedict unexpectedly died the following year and Ratti, a compromise candidate, was elected the new Pope.

In the seventeen years of his pontificate (1922-1939), Pius XI, the scholar pope, was to issue an amazing thirty-one papal encyclicals, almost two every year. For disciples of the Sacred Heart, his encyclical on reparation highlights important facets of Sacred Heart Spirituality. It emphatically points out that the duty of honorable satisfaction or reparation must be rendered to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus if we have failed to love and hallow the Lord through forgetfulness or offense. Then some sort of compensation must be rendered for the injury. Pius XI explicitly notes in the encyclical that "this duty of expiation is laid upon the whole human race."

Pius XI was a thoroughly orthodox pope with a intense interest in Christianizing all aspects of the increasingly secular societies around him and was known for his great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which he strongly recommended to the faithful. His approach was extremely forthright and the times in which he lived, especially during his pontificate, were explosive as the rise of Nazism and Fascism were influencing the allegiance of many people, even those of the Catholic hierarchy. Pius was seen as a no-nonsense man who had a keen mind and a great sense of dignity of the office he occupied. He held very high standards. When the evil forces of surrounding ideologies began to threaten innocent human beings, whatever their religion, he rose to the occasion by expressing his objections in no uncertain terms. This, you can be sure, made him a truly controversial figure at a time of powerful and contentious political movements.

One of the most intriguing aspects of his pontificate is told in the book by journalist Peter Eisner entitled *The Pope's Last Crusade: How an American Jesuit Helped Pope Pius XI's Campaign to Stop Hitler*. It delineates the behind-the-scenes machinations of Church leaders who sought to squelch the planned new encyclical that Pius proposed to be written with the help of an American Jesuit priest. The encyclical, to be entitled *Humani Generis Unitas (On the Unity of the Human Race)*, was to be a clarion call to alert all Catholics and the world at large of the pernicious doctrines of racism and anti-Semitism that were rapidly escalating with the persecution of the Jews. Pius believed that the Nazis would stop at nothing short of world domination, and so he wanted, through this encyclical, to make the strongest statement ever proclaimed by the Vatican in defense of the Jews and discrediting the Nazis belief of anti-Semitism. The encyclical was planned for release soon after a meeting with the bishops on February 11, 1939. Incredibly, Pius died on February 10th, the day before his scheduled speech! Although he had a heart condition, there was suspicion of foul play. Interestingly enough, with the election of his secretary of state, Pius XII, the encyclical was never issued, and the Vatican immediately toned down its vocal protests against Hitler and Mussolini. Some believe that this new approach of covert protest allowed the Nazis to perpetrate greater atrocities against the Jews.

As we approach the season of Lent, it is an appropriate time to consider how we can console the Heart of Jesus so wounded by the sins of the world. There is a huge dilemma facing us though. Many, many people today have relativized sin and do not even know what is a sin and what is not a sin! Evil is being called good, and good called evil. How in the world are we to deal with such mixed-up thinking? To compound the matter, we face conflicting perspectives within our very Church! Yet, the Lord has asked us to make reparation for those who are breaking and distorting his commandments. Remember, he has told us: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15). How then do we proceed to fix the world? We can start by simply making acts of reparation for those who are spiritually blinded. When we do, the Lord has promised us that he will use it to open minds and hearts. +

This talk on Sacred Heart Spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on February 7th, 2016. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, March 6th at 4:00 pm.