



Sacred Heart Talk

(2004)

Last year at this time we Sisters were excitedly preparing for the final event marking our 150th anniversary of foundation. Many of you remember this, I know, for you also participated in one of the first events, our open-house which was followed by a talk similar to today. As I reread the opening statement in our special publication, *The Weaving of a History*, I was struck by these words:

“The Tyringham Visitation of Holy Mary celebrates its sesquicentennial year in 2003, 150 years of continuous existence, a landmark no individual can achieve. Yet it is indeed equally remarkable for a religious community composed of many fragile human beings to reach this milestone. Some of the primary characteristics responsible for the longevity of a religious community are its openness to the following of the Holy Spirit and its willingness to adapt to circumstances from within and without the community.”

The story of these 150 years describes these Sisters as a community of “courage and valor as well as uncertainty and fear; one of poverty and destitution as well as prosperity and sufficiency; one of bright days of stability and success, as well as dark days of near dispersion and failure.” (page 2 *Weaving of a History*) These qualities would become the threads used to begin the weaving of a history, a history that we know must continue into the future.

Could it be that our lives are also like theirs? Are we not also ‘fragile human beings’ reaching a new milestone each day of our lives? You, who so faithfully come to these Hour of Presence talks, are you not demonstrating your openness to the ‘following of the Holy Spirit and your willingness to adapt to circumstances from within and without’ your daily lives as individuals and members of a particular family? Each presentation given on these First Sundays is an attempt to help all better live out the response to that love made manifest through the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

St. Francis de Sales reminds each of us that:

We “belong totally to God. Think of him and he will think of you. He has drawn you to himself so that you may be his; he will take care of you. Do not be afraid, for if little chicks feel perfectly safe when they are under their mother’s wings, how secure should the children of God feel under his paternal protection! So be at peace, since you are one of these children. Let your weary, listless heart rest against the sacred, loving breast of this Savior who, by his providence is a father to his children, and by his gentle, tender love is a mother to them.”

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“Let your weary, listless heart rest against the sacred, loving breast of this Savior.” The Gospel of John describes the beloved apostle as the one who leaned upon the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Last Supper (John 13:23). We may at times envy St. John in his relationship with Christ as we contemplate his loving familiarity with Jesus.

John’s knowledge of the Lord was important for it was there, resting on the Heart of Christ that John learned WISDOM. It was there that John came to know Jesus as merciful, loving and forgiving. There was also another side to John. He was a weak human being just like all of us. He was in the garden. He too fell asleep. He was cautious after Jesus was arrested. Scripture records “Simon and the other disciple followed at a distance . . .” (John 18:15) It took a little time before John got the courage to come forth and stand with Mary and the other women beneath the Cross of Jesus. It is consoling to experience John’s humanity.

Like John, we too experience moments of delight when we Love Jesus and rest on his loving breast. We also have moments when we know and feel our other side, sinful, fearful and weak. The more we allow ourselves to become familiar with the words of Sacred Scripture the more encouragement we will find there to overcome any discouragement because of our darker side. St. Paul, for example reassures us that “while we were yet sinners. He died for us.”

Over this past year, as each Sister has presented an aspect of this spirituality of the Sacred Heart, we all have come to know that it is because of Jesus’ love for each of us in our sinfulness and need that Jesus calls us to rest on His Sacred Heart. “Come to me” he says, “I will give you rest.” We step back and protest the invitation saying, “I’m not worthy . . . I am a sinner . . . If you only knew who I really am, you wouldn’t invite me to get so close.” Yet Jesus says, “I have come to call sinners, not the just.” (Matt. 9:9-13). He would respond to our protests by telling us how sad it makes him to have us refuse his invitation. And he would remind us how he wept over Jerusalem. Replace the name Jerusalem with your own name, as he says:

“ . . . if only you had known the hour of your visitation, [the hour, this moment of my coming to you] and the things that would give you peace. How I would gather you under the shelter of my wings even as a mother gathers her chicks under her wings.”

And he wept (Luke 19:41-42). The tears of God . . . Can we not say that his tears tell of his great love for each of us? Why does God care so much? Can we believe that he really does care about us and what happens in our lives? Yes, of course we can and at times it is easier to believe that than at other times. When things are going well for us, we are comforted in knowing God’s love and tender care. When there are the dry difficult times we might wonder “where are you God?” The Psalmist has voiced this doubt for us some thousands of years ago. Our feelings are not unique, nor are they



new. Through the psalmist, God gave us words to express our deepest frustrations and so we read in Psalm 42:

“Why are you cast down my soul? Why do you moan within me? Trust in God. I will praise him still my Savior and my God.”

I'm sure each of us has felt the pain of rejection. The hurt of the cold shoulder of indifference, of being ignored when we have lovingly reached out to someone we love or want to befriend. Jesus knew this rejection and he wept because “His Sacred Heart (makes) divine love – human” (Basil Hume, OSB). His Sacred Heart interprets divine love in human language [pg. 165] His love and care is for individuals, you and me, not simply humanity in general, but each person individually. The Gospels consistently relate “he laid his hands upon each one of them (Luke 4:40). When Jesus weeps, he weeps for each one of us individually irrespective of our weaknesses, our shortcomings, and our sinfulness. Remember he says to each of us “I have come to call sinners . . .”

When the Sacred Heart appeared to St. Margaret Mary in June 1675, he revealed the intense love of His Heart. That year, in the 17th Century, the world had grown cold not unlike our own and did not appreciate God's love. Jesus Himself had given Margaret Mary the title “beloved disciple of my Sacred Heart.” Can we not also hear Jesus giving each of us that same title? Jesus revealed his unbounded LOVE for humanity as he spoke to St. Margaret Mary and wanted the message of this LOVE to be proclaimed from that moment to this present time. He offers us, through this message, all the treasures of grace found in love and mercy. All we need to do is ask and accept these graces

Jesus still cries out “I thirst” for a return of this love. He, who is the SOURCE of all LOVE, is not yet fully LOVED by each of us. Each Sister tries to share the meaning of his love during these talks. Each presentation of the past has given all of us much to ponder as we strive to respond to the love of His Sacred Heart – to the invitation “Come to Me . . .” This last great revelation to St. Margaret Mary proclaims the vulnerability of God! Vulnerability? Yes, because he leaves the choice to us.

As human beings, I would venture to say that every one of us has been hurt by someone in our life at one time. Some hurts we get over and others fester to the point of causing us great distress. This distress can sometimes be described as a minefield. It may not take much for a wrong step to trigger a deadly explosion. What makes it so distressing is that these hurts literally tear us apart. Why? Is it because we really do not want to react so strongly? So angrily? We really do not want to be this way. St. Paul is often quoted as saying, “The good I want to do, I do not and the evil I do not want to do, I do.” It is so hard to forgive unnecessary sharp remarks resulting from misinterpretation of a well-intentioned action. There is unwarranted resentment shown before I can even offer an explanation. Perhaps it is the pain that comes from feeling unappreciated? Thinking “after all I did for him? For her? For them? I will never go out of my way again!” Perhaps the worst wound is one of



betrayal. We may hear ourselves saying, “but he or she knew better.” I’m sure you could add even more heart-rending examples from your own life experiences

In the face of these wounds and hurtful memories we hear the invitation of the Sacred Heart to come close. We rest, lean on His Sacred Heart and feel the beating of His Heart. We, however, push away from his embrace and cry out saying, “No! You are asking me too much. I just can’t deal with this. It’s not fair! They can’t get away with this. This time I’ve had it, I can play their game too. Ok for them, if they want to be that way, I’ll show them.” The litany of our hurt goes on. It’s real, isn’t it? Perhaps more real than words can describe. We can never underestimate the hurt and pain of another, mine or yours. These experiences can also be very complicated, but that is beyond the scope of this brief time together. In all our experiences let us try to remember that God cares.

Jesus wept. Jesus still weeps for us in our pain and heartache. Jesus also experienced the deep pain of rejection, betrayal, abandonment, being misunderstood, ridiculed, and not being appreciated. God does not owe us anything, yet he weeps for us. He weeps and says, “if only you knew” how much I love you. This divine love becomes alive in a human way in Jesus’ humanity. He has given us the example of how to respond to the anger. He tells us: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27-28). Jesus does not call us to passivity. He calls us to action: love them, do good to them, bless them, pray for them. We can think, “Well and good. It’s easy for you to say, you are not the one who had to take this.” We might even find ourselves saying, “Yes, I know all that – but he’s God!” His ‘being God’ seems to make it all different. Does it seem less real? After all, I’m just a poor weak human being! It’s not easy to have to put up with all this.” It is true, it is not easy to have to put up with all this.

“The impulse toward vengeance is as natural and as ominous as a thunderstorm. Rain blesses in moderation and curses when it causes rivers to burst their bounds.” (Robert C. Morris). As human beings we seek justice, we seek to “right” the wrong. We know that if the seeking of justice is not constrained or transformed it becomes retaliation. This breeds more retaliation, trapping people and nations in enmity for a lifetime and beyond. We can look at the headlines of our newspapers over these many months and see where retaliation leads. Yet when someone strikes out at us it is natural to strike back. Self-defense has a place in the realm of wanting to survive both on the physical and spiritual level. Burying angry feelings can lead to forms of retaliation, such as sarcasm, contempt, emotional distancing of ourselves from the one who has hurt us.

As Christians we are meant to align ourselves with divine attitudes. Listen to what St. Paul writes to the Romans:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room

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for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:14, 17-21) New Revised Standard Version Bible

God has reserved the right for vengeance to himself; "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19 and Deut. 32:35) God promises to repay. I feel that it is important to realize that it may take a long time for this transformation to occur. If we achieve it sooner all the better, nevertheless, it takes time for us to grow into those divine attitudes. We are not sure what that 'repaying' will really mean in our lives or in the life of the one to be repaid. God will take care of it all. We need to trust him.

What does vengeance, transfigured in the Heart of Christ look like? It's not easy to describe. Serene calls to love, understanding and forgiveness may seem pallid prose and unreal when we are the victim. In Jeremiah 51:36 we read God's promise when he has the prophet write this: "I am going to defend your cause and take vengeance for you." That we are not to pay back the offenders was a command of God recorded in the Old Testament book of Leviticus, the book of the Law of God. "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; for I am the Lord." (Lev.19:18) It's not getting any easier is it? There is no magic leap from desire for vengeance to forgiveness and charity. Yet we read in Matthew 7:14 "Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life and only a few find it." Albeit, this is the road less traveled. And I – shall I choose it?

Prayer is the great crucible for transformation of the heart. When we are alone with our thoughts and feelings we are probably replaying the events that have wounded and upset us anyway, so why not bring God into the larger picture. "It takes profound faith to trust our vengeance to God." (K.C. Ptomey) We are not really sure that he will take care of things the way we think he should. We could certainly offer some suggestions about what should be done! We are called to trust him in all this. That is usually the hard part.

I was reminded of a bumper sticker that reads: "Don't get mad, get even." However the Psalms take the opposite approach: "Don't get even, get mad!" Bring it to speech, bring it to prayer. It's OK to do all that with God. The Psalms are filled with examples that demonstrate that with God all "subjects, emotions, even the darkest of human emotions are legitimate material for conversation with God." (Ptomey).

Jesus means it when he says, "Come to Me . . ." He is loving and gentle and just and calls for accountability. He accepts us in all our humanness, yes, even the hateful moments, the moments when we are teeming with vengeful emotions. Left to ourselves vengeance is destructive. In God,

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the opposite of vengeance is compassion. “Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest.” In other words he will support us; He will sustain and help us with this cross. When we do not turn to Jesus in our hurt, feelings of anger, sorrows and actions that have deeply injured us, we hurt ourselves!

Up to this point, I haven't really said much about the person who has caused the offense, the hurt, the emotional pain that we are experiencing . One reason for not speaking about the offender is that we cannot insinuate or suppose that we know the offender's thinking. Sometimes it happens that the other person doesn't even have a clue that they have done something. Oh, we think, “that's impossible, of course they know!” But do they really? When we are hurt or angered by what someone has done to us, it is hard to be rational. We need to have some time and space and once we have regained our composure. We can then ask the person some gentle, non-threatening questions to clarify the events. Or perhaps we will decide to just move on giving the person the benefit of the doubt; they might be having a bad day; there was really no malice intended. What do you think? What has been your experience with this?

There is so much more that could be said. However, let us bring the threads of our weaving together and take this one last look at the image of the Sacred Heart woven into our personal history.

In light of what Jesus has done for each of us, by becoming a human like us, let us remember His GIFT OF LOVE. This divine love flows from the Heart of the Word made flesh. This love still flows and is still being poured out upon us through His gift of love, His Holy Spirit. The Church teaches that this Heart still lives and beats and is indissolubly united to the Person of the Divine Word. He is constantly spilling out his LOVE through his Spirit upon all the members of His Mystical Body. (PP XII). This Heart of Jesus, says, John Paul II, is truly “human and at the same time the true symbol of his interior life; his thought, his will, his desire, his feelings.” Through this Heart, the humanity of Christ is a Heart that remains open to and for each person. To see vengeance or anger transformed by love, we need to see it in the Light of this Sacred Heart. This Light is mounted upon the Cross of Calvary, for us, for all people of all times and places. This light illumines the darkness of our pain, our sorrow, our anxieties and frustrations. It illumines the darkness of our fatigue and our stresses.

His love is real, yes, he is God and man, and that is very real. He is, like us, in all things but sin. He walked the earth. He had friends some remained faithful, some walked away from Him, and some denied they even knew Him. You know the story well. Once, when the disciples of Jesus were feeling good about themselves and life was pleasant for them with Jesus, they in their enthusiasm wanted to know God like he knew him. “Teach us to pray” they said, “teach us how to talk to God like you do. . .” And so Jesus said, “When you pray to God, when you talk to God I like I do, say this. . . “Our Father.” and there was that special petition that can sometimes be hard to say, especially when



we are angry with someone, “and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Did that petition spring from some experience that Jesus had? He knew the pain of rejection, betrayal and victimization, felt sorrowful, sad, frustrated with others. We see what he taught us played out during His passion. He turned the other cheek and he went the extra mile ~ he died for us and rose on the third day in order to give us hope. When he rose from the dead, all that he suffered was made glorious, but remember, he still bore the wounds in His risen body so that we would know that what he suffered was real!

In conclusion, although these life events will happen again and again, let us accept the invitation that Jesus holds out to us to come into his embrace and listen to the love of his Sacred Heart. Let us not push away and say, “No, you are asking too much this time.” Let us listen to the silence of his love calling us to live more fully the forgiving love of his heart. Forgiveness is a decision. Forgiveness is hard work. “Forgiveness is a gradual realization that we cannot control another.” (Van Breemen p. 127). Forgiveness like the landmark event of 150 years of existence, takes “courage and valor as well as uncertainty and fear; a willingness to adapt to the circumstances of life” and to be open the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our forgiveness is best seen in our actions and not always just in our words. Do not be afraid, Jesus tells us. He does not say, have no fear, for that is not possible. He simply tells us that we must not become our fears. So, “let your weary, listless heart rest against the sacred, loving breast of our Savior.” (St. Francis de Sales) Let us draw near with confidence to this Sacred Heart inviting us to “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest.” Matt11:28

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Weeping With God as A Spiritual Discipline by Jan Johnson page 37;

At the Heart of Vengeance by Robert -C. Morris, page 6;

Get Mad, Not Even: A meditation on Psalm 137 by K.C. Ptomey, Jr. page 14;

Getting Even A Reflection on Vengeance and Romans 12-13 by Gerrit Scott Dawson, page 22.