

Sacred Heart of Jesus, Aflame with Love for us

Dear Friends of the Sacred Heart,

Happy New Year! My college friends will tell you that, being the outspoken young lady that I was, I made it a point to wish everyone I saw a Happy Liturgical New Year on the First Sunday of Advent, just to help them stay in God's timing and not the world's! My school, DeSales University, was situated in the Lehigh Valley. In this valley was also the little town of Bethlehem, PA. For almost 100 years, they have had a 25-foot star erected above the tree line on a 91-foot tall structure visible from over 28 miles away! (At Easter time, they light up only the rays which are vertical and horizontal and so the star becomes a giant cross). But, as famous and well-known as it is, it seems the exact spot is a mystery for most people! I had a college friend who carefully and diligently followed the star to find where it lay. We went there a few times and almost always were the only ones there, a constant source of amazement to me. In a town surrounded by 5 different colleges and teaming with young adventurous students, why was this not a place that people wanted to go? Was it too hard to find? Or perhaps it was simply there too long to be exciting enough to seek out.

This memory spoke to me of how brilliantly the Lord shines in our lives and yet so many fail to seek Him out. Fail to follow the star to its resting place and find the treasure hidden below. In my case the treasure was a hilltop with a view of the city. A quiet spot in the woods to ponder God and be together with close friends away from the hustle and bustle of college life. But there is a greater Treasure which we all seek, the Treasure of His Sacred Heart. The Treasure of the Love of God. Do we take the time to seek out this Flaming Heart of Love or has His presence in our lives become something we take for grant-it?

So we open a New Year with this sparkling light. A light which beckons us to seek, to come closer, to discover more. It is amazing how traffic is always slow around a house that has a wonderful display of lights. And how we seem drawn to examine even the smallest little flickers. One of our daily times of prayer includes readings from Saints or Church scholars. Last week we read from St. Augustine:

“Let us long for our heavenly country, let us sigh for our heavenly home... What shall we then see? Let the Gospel tell us: ‘In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God’. You will come to the fountain; with whose dew you have already been sprinkled. Instead of the ray of light which was sent though slanting and winding ways into the heart of your darkness, you will see the light itself in all its purity and brightness.”

The Light Itself! What is this light but the Sacred Heart Himself! St. Margaret Mary tells us:

“On the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, ... the Divine Heart was represented to me as a throne all of fire with flames radiating its light on every side. It appeared more brilliant than the sun and transparent like crystal. The wound which He received on the Cross appeared clearly. There was a crown of thorns around the Sacred Heart and It was surmounted by a cross. My Divine Savior gave me to understand that these instruments of His Passion signified that the immense love which He had for men was the cause of all the sufferings and all the humiliations which He willed to suffer for us: that from the first moment of His Incarnation, all these torments and all this contempt were present to Him, and that it was at this first moment that the Cross was... planted in His Sacred Heart”

So how can we more actively seek out this Heart? Find this treasure which began at his Incarnation? This Living Flame of Love which was pointed out to the wise men by a star in the sky? Looking at the quote from St. Margaret Mary, we see that this light, and these flames issue from the source of Love. A Love which is expressed most particularly in the Passion of the Cross. And so we must look to the Passion. There at the scene of crucifixion, we see no light. St. Matthew says, “There was darkness over the whole land” (Mt. 27:45) So, this begs the question of course that if all these symbols around His Sacred

Heart speak of the Passion and its implantation within even His Tiny Infant Heart. Why the flames? Why is it “more brilliant than the sun”?

I have come across a few different reasons, but there are two I would like to focus on here. The first and most obvious is the symbolism of fire and love. A heart aflame speaks of the “burning” love of one person for another. We speak in these terms even with human love and so it makes sense that God become man would have a heart aflame with love for man! St. Margaret Mary herself explains this Heart as an “abyss of love”.

The second reason which I came across was one I had never heard and yet, to me, it ties everything together. The article stated, “Christ’s self-offering on the cross was the one-time perfect consummation of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament. This necessarily included burnt offerings, which were the highest form of sacrifices in ancient Israel”. So, the fact that the Passion of Jesus was the penultimate sacrificial offering which once and for all cast out all sin, it had to be the highest form of sacrifice, a holocaust completely consumed in the offering. St. John Paul II reflected, “A furnace burns, and, in burning, it consumes everything, be it wood or other easily combustible substances. The Heart of Jesus, the human Heart of Jesus burns with love which fills it. And this is the love for the eternal Father and love for mankind, for his adopted sons and daughters. [The Sacred Heart of Jesus] has something of the nature of fire which burns and blazes in order to illuminate and warm” And so, Christ’s Heart is on fire, consumed by Love for His Father and for us.

It is the light which shines and beckons to us. It is the star more brilliant than a thousand suns which leads us to the true treasure of His Love! Forgive me if I go back to St. Margaret Mary one more time:

“it seemed to me that I saw this amiable Heart like a sun projecting its rays in every direction and on every heart, but in a manner differing very much according to the dispositions of those on whom these rays fell; for the souls of the lost became still more hardened, as mud becomes hardened by the rays of the sun; on the contrary, the souls of the just became more pure and were softened like wax.”

This last passage caught my attention because the rays shine forth on “every heart”. Both the hearts that love and respond, and the hearts who turn aside. Just like our little Bethlehem star in college... everyone could see it, and everyone was in some way penetrated by the rays shining down from South Mountain. But, how many responded? How many sought it out in return? It is a little bit frightening to think that the rays of Pure Love could actually harden a heart which is lost. The Lord does not hide from anyone and sends out His Love to all, but we have a responsibility to respond.

How then, do we become pliable wax instead of hardened clay and mud? We choose. We believe. We love. If we continue the quote from St. John’s Gospel which St. Augustine was commenting on above we hear:

“In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shone in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it... The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and His own people received Him not. But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the power to become children of God.”-Jn 1:4-5,9-12

It is very simple and very hard all at once. I was sharing this with one of our elderly sisters and said to her, It’s all very simple, right? She responded with a sparkle in her eyes, “Yes!... and No”. How true. All we need to do is to choose. To love, to believe, to let God love us and change our hearts, for we cannot do it ourselves, yet He can very easily! Therein is the hard part. To truly allow the Lord to take control, to allow Him to transform the mud in our hearts into wax so that the rays of His Love can penetrate and melt them, this can sometimes mean a painful letting go of our own desires and plans and will.

If we can do this, the Lord will transform our hearts into tiny beacons of light to help direct and guide other souls as they too (knowingly or unknowingly) seek that Infinitely Loved Treasure of His Heart. The more we ask Him to Help us, especially through the Sacraments, the more we will be enabled to bring His joy to the world and also to bring Joy to the Heart of God Himself!

May our hearts burn with a fire of Love. A flame enkindled by the Flame of His Most Sacred Heart. May our hearts be little stars which sparkle in the world, brightening the lives of those around us and giving them a glimpse at the greatest treasure of all. The Treasure of Our Infant King, Our Loving Savior, Our Crucified Lord.

God be Praised!

This talk on Sacred Heart Spirituality was given in our Monastery on December 1st, 2024. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the Sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday February 2nd at 4pm