

Some words for the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

*'O Sacred Heart, our home lies deep in Thee;
on earth Thou art an exile's rest, in heav'n the glory of the blest, O Sacred Heart.
O Sacred Heart, Thou fount of contrite tears;
where'er those living waters flow, new life to sinners they bestow, O Sacred Heart.'*¹



Readings:

Deuteronomy 7:6-11

Psalm 102:1-4. 6-8. 10. R.v.17

1 John 4:7-16

Matthew 11:25-30

Dear Parishioners of St Joseph's & St Charles,

I am old enough to remember a time when most Catholic households contained at least a crucifix and, quite often, a few other religious images or statues also. The bedroom I slept in as a small child had two statues I recall; Our Lady of Lourdes and St Joseph. You could often recognise a Catholic home in those days simply by looking up at the bedroom windows and spotting the back of a statue in one of them. If, as it seemed to me, a crucifix of Jesus or a picture of Our Lady vied for first place in popularity then the Sacred Heart was easily the next image in the charts. I say image because, although you did see statues, it was more often a picture - usually framed, and accompanied with a prayer of blessing for the family and home - that held pride of place. Most spectacularly, some people had small, red-bulbed electric lights burning before the image and, even as a child, I was able to make some hazy and tentative connection between the red lamp in the church and the one in

somebody's home. It has been encouraging to hear examples of how some of our homes have become repopulated with domestic shrines and prayers during the lockdown.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was immensely popular and many family homes were consecrated to the heart of Jesus. With its simple emphasis on taking the Lord's physical heart as the representation of his divine love for humanity the human imagination is easily engaged. Yes, we now know far more about the heart as a bio-electrical pump than the biblical or Classical world did but we still instinctively 'measure' a person's heart when we first get to know them. Most of us will have experienced the power of the heart, and we still regularly speak of having a heart-stopping moment or of being broken-hearted for example, while others might sometimes describe us as appearing light-hearted. Our literature, art and song remain shot through with the impulse and inspiration of the human heart.

Today's gospel reading gives us a glimpse into the heart of Jesus and it begins with him first at prayer. We can know nothing certain of the heart of God unless it has been revealed to us, and so we are privileged to hear Jesus proclaim, *'I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.'*² Having rebuked the lakeside towns of Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida³ for rejecting the path of repentance, Jesus swiftly moved on to consideration of those who had accepted him instead. Clearly frustrated with *'this generation,'*⁴ the faithful Son nevertheless expresses his gratitude to his Father for how things have unfolded, *'for that is what it pleased you to do.'*⁵ Learning and intellectual capability are not what are deemed most necessary for the acceptance of Jesus; rather, it is the possession of a simplicity and capacity to trust, so similar to that of the heart of a child, that is key. On more than one occasion, Jesus used the example of a child to speak not only of the relationship between the master and the disciple, but of that between the loving Father and the trusting Son. Wherever he went, those who possessed power or position rejected him, while the weak and the lowly, the powerless and the publically-shunned sinner flocked to him.

Most of us find that the act of trust becomes somewhat easier when we have little to lose and all of us find it much more difficult to abandon our sense of security and independence when we have things in our lives we wish to keep. The thought of being dependent is something we all find difficult to swallow and our ability to exercise even minimal wealth, privilege or power over people or things is not something we surrender lightly. Jesus trusted completely for, though *'his state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and ... he was humbler yet, even to accepting death.'*⁶ Though he was a king,⁷ Jesus has been entrusted by his Father to come into the world and reveal his power and majesty through loving abandonment. So intimate is their relationship that, *'no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the*

*Son.*⁸ Is there testimony here one wonders to the relationship that Jesus had enjoyed with St Joseph? What is certain is that the Son and the Father are of one heart, completely aligned with one another, and so seeing and hearing Jesus brings us into the presence of his Father also. Yet, for those who wish and who are open-hearted, Jesus is willing to reveal more. If we can avoid being full of our self - of our sense of worth and importance - we may well find that there is room in our heart to trust, and for God's grace to grow and Spirit to dwell.

In *'choosing to reveal him,'*⁹ Jesus memorably opens his heart to all *'who labour and are overburdened.'*¹⁰ Promising rest, he offers his yoke for he is *'gentle and humble in heart.'*¹¹ Jewish Law was often spoken of as a yoke, and even the very finest Rabbi or Pharisee found it impossible to strictly adhere to. In speaking both of labour and burden we can distinguish in the words of Jesus the reality that we all face in life. Some tasks I choose to undertake and others are put upon me. All sorts of burdens are placed on our shoulders by virtue of our personal relationships, through marriage or parenthood for example, and we all live in societies regulated by laws and decrees. Even were we to find our self on a desert island we would still face the struggle to be free from enslavement to our passions and vices, and to be liberated also from the impulses of desire. None of us can escape the yoke in our lives and it is important to realise that we are not asked to be without it. Instead, we are asked to accept the Lord's own yoke, which is gentle. It does not remove other burdens either but, as it alone can offer true liberation and provide refreshment for our souls,¹² it can make the journey suddenly much more easy and light.¹³ Indeed, some scholars have noted that the practice at the time, of two animals being yoked together side-by-side, means that what Jesus was offering was himself, to walk alongside us.

There is a whole industry of self-help and bias-awareness these days – often with stricter 'laws' and customs than Judaism or Christianity – and many political creeds compete for our attention and declare their sole ability to deliver us true freedom and choice (invariably at the expense of others). Despite the plethora of programmes, workshops and initiatives, the ridding of prejudice from institutions, cultures and societies will always prove to be an uphill battle. It is much easier to tackle discrimination, what we say and do, than it is to tackle prejudice, what we think or believe. Prejudice is an expression of what lies in our minds and hearts. If our modern day conservatism, liberalism and socialism, clearly do not match the intent or evils committed by much of twentieth century fascism and communism, then they do share, like nearly all political ideologies, a jealous desire to vanquish opposition and to bring people to a conviction that their own vision of society is the correct one.

The heart that Jesus offered to us was a heart of sacrificial love. Created in his image and likeness, he knows what we are capable of, both for good and for ill, and, in asking us to weed out any division from our hearts, he only asks we allow to flourish that which was already planted in aeons past. *'Every form of social or cultural*

*discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design. On coming into the world, man is not equipped with everything he needs for developing his bodily and spiritual life. He needs others ... The "talents" are not distributed equally. These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular "talents" share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods.'*¹⁴

Both blood and water are recorded as flowing from the side of Jesus after his death on the Cross. Devotion to his Sacred Heart emphasised this dual fruit by speaking of both consecration and reparation. The water that flows from the side of Christ washes away our sins and consecrates us as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart.¹⁵ It speaks therefore of dedication to the heart of the other; to God and neighbour. The Precious Blood that flowed from our Lord's body reminds us of the inevitable sacrifices that true love requires of our own hearts and lives. By joining these sacrifices to Christ on his Cross,¹⁶ we may give glory to God through greater service of each other.

Since 2002, the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus has also been a special Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests. Please pray for the priests who serve or have served you, and remember also those who have died. Being called to emulate and embody the heart of Christ is an improbable task at the best of times but it is impossible with a divided heart. '*Learn from me,*'¹⁷ says the Lord, as he shows us the true meaning of a whole and holy human heart. Mary has been called the Mother of Priests and, as tomorrow sees the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I cannot help but wonder if her only son, the Eternal High Priest, was so humble that he, the God-man, learnt something of the mysteries of the gentle and humble heart from her?

*'Sweet heart of Jesus, bless all hearts that love thee,
and may thine own heart ever blessed be,
bless us, dear Lord, and bless the friends we cherish,
and keep us true to Mary and to thee.*

*Sweet heart of Jesus, we implore, O make us love thee more and more.'*¹⁸

Our Lady of Walsingham, *pray for us*
St Joseph, *pray for us*
St Charles Borromeo, *pray for us*

With my prayers,
Rev. Mark McManus
Parish Priest

19 June 2020

The picture is of a mosaic from the *Basilique du Sacré-Coeur de Montmartre*, Paris

1. *O Sacred Heart, our home lies deep in Thee*, verses 1 & 2, Aloys Schlör, (d. 1852)
2. *Matthew* 11:25
3. *Matthew* 11:20-24
4. *Matthew* 11:16
5. *Matthew* 11:26
6. *Philippians* 2:6-8
7. *John* 18:37
8. *Matthew* 11:27
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Matthew* 11:28
11. *Matthew* 11:29
12. *Matthew* 11:30
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ccc. 1935 – 1937
15. *1 Peter* 2:9
16. *Colossians* 1:24
17. *Matthew* 11:29
18. *Sweet heart of Jesus, fount of love and mercy*, verse 4, author unknown, c. 1900