



Bishop Hicks' Column

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Celebrating a Loving and Merciful Heart



Pope Leo XIII consecrated the entire world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on June 11, 1899. Since then, every pope has renewed the consecration to the Sacred Heart. As we celebrate this 125th Jubilee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I thought I'd share some interesting historical background.

While devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus has its roots in medieval Europe, the more contemporary devotion stems from revelations received by the French nun, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, VHM. In the 1670s, while praying before the Blessed Sacrament, she witnessed the pierced and bleeding heart of Christ with flames and a crown of thorns. After this, she continued to experience multiple apparitions, or images, of Jesus' Sacred Heart, focusing on God's love and mercy.

Fast forward to the turn of the 20th century. In 1917 the world was experiencing political and social upheavals. The stage was being set for World War I which was grimly followed by the horrific World War II. Pope Leo XIII witnessed the rising of secularism, materialism, and other distressing injustices. He had faith that consecrating the world to the Sacred Heart would promote worldly peace and stability through the infinite love of Jesus, which calls us to love one another.

Thirty years ago, during my first month of priesthood, I celebrated Mass on a "First Friday." Afterwards, I remarked to one of the volunteers in the sacristy, "I wonder why there were so many more people at today's Mass." In a matter of fact tone she said, "It is because today is First Friday." I naively asked, "What is First Friday?" She was flabbergasted at my ignorance! Wide-eyed, she blurted, "Father! You do not know what First Friday is? How is that possible?"

Regrettably, I had never been exposed to the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus prior to my ordination to priesthood. But ever since that First Friday Mass and my embarrassing encounter in the sacristy afterwards, I have yearned to grow in my devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

This "First Friday" devotion to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion is rooted in the promises made by

Jesus to Saint Margaret Mary. She wrote the following about Jesus' revelation to her about First Friday: "I promise you in the excessive mercy of My Heart that its all-powerful love will grant to all those who receive Holy Communion on nine first Fridays of consecutive months the grace of final repentance; they will not die under My displeasure or without receiving their sacraments, My divine Heart making itself their assured refuge at the last moment."

For some Catholics, familiarity with the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is commonplace and may be comfortably integrated within their spiritual lives. For others, there is the possibility of being a baptized, confirmed, and practicing Catholic without ever being exposed to or really knowing anything about this beautiful devotion (like me in the early part of my life).

If you are a "devotee of this devotion," I hold your faithful practices in high regard. Perhaps you'll consider asking someone else - your children, grandchildren, or a friend from church - if they know about the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In a warm and sincere manner, without berating or belittling, you might want to share prayers and information about the Sacred Heart with your family, friends, or faith community. With this evangelizing spirit, we might help others discover and deepen their own relationship with the Sacred Heart, expanding the reach of Christ's love, mercy, and compassion.

As we celebrate the Jubilee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we also realize that our world faces challenges like it did 125 years ago, with increasing conflicts and complexities. As our world continues to attach itself to secularism, atheism, agnosticism, apathy, injustices, indifferences, and a rejection of morals, values, and faith, we are in need of the power of God's love more than ever. How beautiful and powerful it is that Jesus gave us His very heart, which eternally beats with love, mercy, and compassion for us and the world.

O most holy heart of Jesus, fountain of every blessing, we adore you and we love you. And as we celebrate our fathers - those on this earth and those in heaven, as well as our priests, our spiritual fathers - we ask you to bless them and your Church this Father's Day and always.