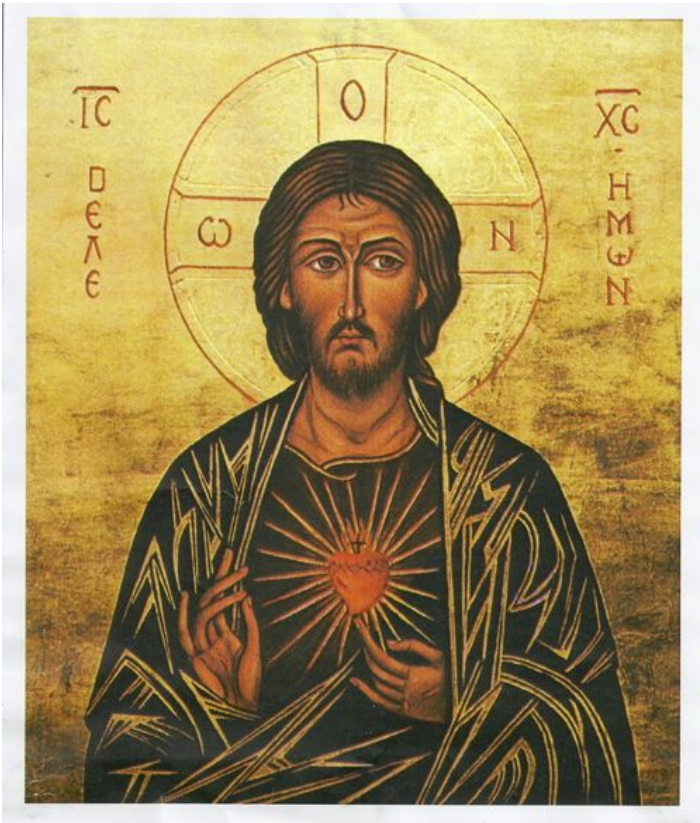


## The Sacred Heart of Jesus



When you do damage to a limb, either your own or someone else's, it causes pain. There is pain, too, in the process of healing. The limb needs to be repaired. We have to support the broken bone and use the muscles to strengthen the limb. Pain keeps reminding us of the damage that has been done, and it warns us to go gently. We suffer when the damage is done, and we continue to suffer while the damage is being repaired.

This is true also in the psychological sphere. Whenever we are treated in a non-loving way we suffer, and we carry that suffering often for many years. Even when we come to know what the problem is, we find it hard to adjust our behaviour. Repairing the wounds can be so painful that we lack the courage to do what is necessary to repair the hurts that life has dealt us. This goes, too, for the hurts we have caused other people. Much of our hurting of others comes from our own woundedness.

Those of you who are married know that marriage is a commitment of love, but it is a commitment of love made by two wounded people who aren't always able to love very well. It is so easy to hurt those we love most - often because we really don't know any better. Hence the need for forgiveness. Parents hurt their children - again this is mostly unintended, but it is no less real for that. The children carry these hurts into their own adult lives, and so it is that hurts are handed on. Sometimes it is just too painful to

change so we end up hardening our hearts.

Pope John-Paul II speaks of this in an address which he gave to the youth of France: 'The heart is the opening of our being to others, the capacity of feeling with them, of understanding them. Such a true and deep sensitivity makes us vulnerable. That is why some people are tempted to free themselves from the danger of being hurt by hardening their hearts'.

If we want to see what this hardening of heart looks like on a grand scale we have only to look at the terrible events currently tearing Syria and Iraq apart. A lot of suffering in our world - not all of it, but a lot of it - is the result of the hurts we inflict upon each other. In other words it is the result of sin - whether this sin is intentional or unintentional. And the point upon which I want to focus here is that not only is suffering caused when the damage is inflicted, but even the very process of attempting to repair the damage is often accompanied by suffering. This suffering in part of the healing process itself, but it is suffering none the less.

This is why the symbol of God's love for us is the pierced heart of Jesus. Jesus' love was given to a very wounded world. As John tells us, he took upon himself the sin of the world, and with that sin he took upon himself the burden of suffering that was unavoidable if healing was to be effected. He couldn't take all the suffering from us. We have to suffer the pain of facing our hurts and repairing them. But, by sharing our pain, to the extent of giving his life for us, he took from us the awful despair that overwhelms us when we feel that we are suffering alone, and to no purpose. His faith supports ours, and his love encourages us to go through the pain that is needed if we are to heal. Furthermore, he invites us to share in his compassion for others so that we can help him repair the hurts that sin causes in our world.

Hence the important place of Reparation in devotion to the Sacred Heart. To consecrate our lives to his heart involves a commitment to share in the love he gave to repair the hurts of the world. Saint Paul expresses this powerfully: 'I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, for I am completing what is lacking in my flesh of Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church' (Colossians 1:24).

In every generation, we need to witness a love that is willing to share our pain. There is no other way for us to find the courage to dare the journey of healing. Moved by the love God has shown us, we want, like Paul, to commit ourselves to continue Jesus' mission. This involves a commitment to do three things, all of which involve suffering. Firstly, we commit ourselves to undergo the pain of repairing the wounds that others have caused us. As we become aware of the dysfunctional ways in which we behave, in this case through no fault of our own, we recall the love of the heart of Jesus for those who have hurt us, and we commit ourselves to respond to the grace that is being offered to us by forgiving them, as Jesus forgives them ('Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'), and by taking care not to react and hurt them back

('Offer the other cheek').

Secondly, we commit ourselves to undergo the pain of repairing the wounds that we have caused others, by apologising to others when we catch ourselves acting out of our brokenness and hurt. We cannot bring about reconciliation on our own, as the person we have hurt may not be ready or willing to be reconciled, but we commit ourselves to be open to being reconciled, and to be ready to bear whatever pain is necessary, when and if the other person desires reconciliation.

Thirdly, through the exercise of practical compassion, we commit ourselves to undergo the suffering involved in giving our lives, as Jesus did, to repair the wounds that we see around us. Jesus came to 'bind up hearts that are broken'(Isaiah 61:1), for he knew that 'The Lord is near to the broken-hearted'(Psalm 34:18). In consecrating our hearts to him, we commit ourselves to be close to him by being close to those he loves in a special way. It is the love in his heart that flows into ours and only this love can sustain us to bear the unavoidable pain involved in repairing the wounds which we suffer because of our weakness and our sin. Nowhere more clearly than in the task of reparation do we experience the privilege of sharing in Jesus' cross, sharing in his redeeming love.

The saints have seen the visible wound caused by the soldier's lance as a sign of the invisible wound inflicted on the heart of Jesus by those who, in the words of John's gospel, 'did not recognise him'(1:10), and 'refused to accept him'(1:12). How can we be close to Jesus without sensing his pain and wanting to embrace the cross with him? When Jesus cried out to his Father in the garden of agony, God sent an angel to console him. Since time means nothing to God, why should we doubt that the love we offer to him was part of the consolation he experienced there?

And this consolation which we offer to Jesus, continues now, for, as he himself said: 'whatever you do to the least of those I love, you do to me'(Matthew 25:40). Every time we hurt another person, we drive the lance again into Jesus' heart. Every time we are present to someone as a consoling angel, we bring consolation to the Heart of Jesus who finds our love an outlet for his own. Are we too pre-occupied, too busy to respond to Jesus' plea?

Speaking of being over-busy, I am reminded of the Japanese words for 'too busy'. The Japanese have two characters to represent the expression 'too busy': one is the character for 'heart', and the other is the character for 'destruction'. To be 'too busy' is to cause 'heart-destruction'. How true that is, and how often we are destroying our own and other people's hearts because we do not take time to nurture the heart.

It is not a matter of seeking suffering. Saint Margaret Mary, whom God used to spread the devotion to his heart throughout the world, wrote: 'The better thing is neither to seek any suffering nor to refuse any, but to abandon oneself to pure love by allowing oneself to be crucified and to be consumed as He wishes'(Vie et Oeuvres, 1924 Vol 2, page 422, quoted Glotin, *Il Cuore misericordioso di Gesù* [Rome: Dehoniane, 1993],

page 50).

Saint Therese of Lisieux gave herself wholeheartedly to a life committed to sharing the suffering of Jesus to whom she gave herself as spouse. At the end of her short life, however, she wrote: 'I no longer desire suffering or death, though I love them both. It is love alone that attracts me'(Manuscript A, 1895, page 178).

Her last words, recorded by those who prayed around her bed, were: 'I do not regret having given my life over to love . . . Oh, I love Him! My God, I love you'(30th Sept 1897). Abbé Pierre, a French priest who worked for the poor of France after the Second World War, saw love and suffering as sharing a dance: 'Suffering says to love: Do not leave me, you who have called for me. I know that without you I would turn back and become, once again, something ugly. Tell me that you will never leave me. I am afraid to find myself alone. Love replies: Do not be afraid. Perhaps you fail to realise that with you I become more beautiful, though people find this hard to imagine and believe. yes, my beloved Suffering, I love you because you complete my beauty and because you alone know how to bring love to perfection, full of light and joy'.

Suffering remains a mystery for us. On this Feast of the Sacred Heart, as we look upon his pierced heart, let us ask for the grace to embrace the suffering that is in our lives, trusting that we are sharing with him in the pain that is healing and repairing our broken, wounded world.

### **Act of Reparation**

'Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, Your heart, pierced on the cross and raised from the dead, remains for ever the living sign of your Father's love for mankind. We want to draw closer to this gift that God has given to us. We want to learn to value what your heart tells us about God and about ourselves. We want everyone to experience the love of which your pierced heart is the symbol. But we have failed in our trust. We have not allowed you to transform our hearts into your own. How can people believe in your Father's love, if we resist finding it in your heart, and if they cannot see it in ours? We want to make amends for our slowness to believe in your love. We want to repair the hurt done to ourselves and to others by our sin. We want to share the compassion of your heart. We want to take upon ourselves some of the suffering caused by the sins that others commit. We want to bring the love of your Father into everyone's life. Lord Jesus, really present in the Eucharist, pour your Spirit into our hearts. Fill them with your love, so that others will experience your love in our hearts. Then they will be drawn to you, and you can take them to the Father, with whom you live and reign in the unity of the Holy Spirit, from generation to generation, for ever. Amen.