

Feast of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

Let us begin our reflections with the words taken from the Isaiah Scroll for the First Reading of today's feast. Apart from a few verses appended to the text, these are the last words of the Isaiah Scroll. The Exiles from Babylon returned to Judah with such high hopes, born of the unexpected turn of events: Cyrus of Persia, having conquered the Babylonian forces, gave permission for the Exiles to return home and re-build Jerusalem and their Temple. For the exiles this was nothing short of miraculous. They felt they were reliving the experience of their ancestors who were freed from slavery in Egypt to journey through the desert to the Promised Land.

Their hopes were dashed. Judah was in a depressed state, and the leaders sought to build their security on a narrow interpretation of the Torah, not on justice. This is all described in the Isaiah Scroll, but they refused to despair, and today's First Reading is a magnificent testimony to their faith.

In spite of the wonderful leadership we have received in the institution of the Church, there are plenty of reasons for us, too, to be disappointed that the realisation of the dream of Vatican II has been so slow. Whatever our disappointments, we are challenged today to see the Church as our mother, and ourselves as brothers and sisters of Jesus, members of his Body. Whatever our failings, and the failings of others, we are privileged to belong to the community of Jesus' disciples, and he is present continually gracing us. As with the community of Jesus' disciples after the shock of Jesus' death, so now, it is Jesus' Mother who continues to gather us around her, never doubting Jesus' promise to be with us, to send his Spirit to inspire us to share in his communion with God and experience the fire of his Spirit.

This brings us to today's Gospel in which Jesus entrusts his disciples to his mother. In John's Gospel she appears at the beginning, at a wedding banquet, a celebration of love. There she is addressed as 'woman', for she represents every Jewish mother awaiting the Messiah. There Jesus speaks of his hour, the hour when he would pour out the fullness of his Spirit from his pierced heart. The outpouring began at Cana. It reaches its goal on Calvary. Whatever failures we sinful members of the Church have to deal with, we must not cease looking at Jesus' heart, as his mother did on Calvary, and we must never forget that Mary is, indeed, our mother. Like the disciples of Isaiah we must never let our failures, or the failures of the Church, obscure the wonder of love that is offered us in the Church, and by our mother, Mary, Jesus final gift to us.

To conclude this brief reflection, let us join in singing a hymn to Mary, 'Woman of the Sacred Heart.'