

Triumph of the Heart

THE HEART OF THE REDEEMER
IS OPEN TO ALL

Family of Mary

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The intimate bond with the Mother of the Lord will lead the 'beloved disciple' to become the apostle of that Love that he drew from the Heart of Christ through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

*From Pope John Paul II's homily
on Palm Sunday 2003, in St. Peter's Square*

The Heart of the Redeemer is open to all

*Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus—in days gone by, but today?
Behind the times and old fashioned! We may have these thoughts, especially when we
think of litanies and tacky Sacred Heart statues or pictures.
And yet this divine and, at the same time, deeply sensitive human heart of the Lord
is worthy to be honored and loved at all times.*

We will never be able to exhaust its treasures of grace!

*Whoever comes to know more and more Jesus' heart will love and adore it all
the more thankfully. Every saint, right up to the 20th century, has experienced this.
May this issue of "Triumph of the Heart" help you dear friends and benefactors—the
believers of today—to find anew a completely modern, deep devotion to the Sacred
Heart, in a time in which God's mercy is needed like never before.*

His heart means his innermost being

*I*n biblical language, the heart is the innermost part of the soul, the place where couples promise to be faithful to one another for their whole lives or where priests say their yes to God forever. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is also about the interior life of the Lord. It is about getting to know and admiring his innermost being, his character, understanding his movements, his virtues and his merci-

ful and redemptive love. Therefore our nicest and most sincere form of devotion to the Sacred Heart is imitating Jesus' attitude, imitating his love for the father, his love for his mother, his love for mankind and creation. When we pray "Form my heart unto thine!" we mean nothing other than, "Form my nature according to your nature!"

Biblical devotion to the Sacred Heart

To understand better the essence of his heart, let us look in the Bible, because the foundation and source of every Sacred Heart devotion comes from it. The Gospel, which talks about the life and works of our Redeemer, breathes page for page the goodness of this human and divine heart and its mercy for us. St. Gregory the Great said aptly, “*We recognize God’s heart in God’s word.*” Yes, a few special, impressing passages should help us to understand that everything that the Lord said and did was, so to speak, said and done “*with his heart*”.

Jesus only spoke once very openly and directly about his heart. This is one of the nicest passages in the Bible in which he characterizes it, and thus his love, with two traits, revealing therefore the most important virtues of his heart. “*Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart*” (Mt 11:29b). And Jesus invites us, “*Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened*” (Mt 11:28) and he promises that our soul will find rest and peace in his heart.

The oldest biblical depiction of the Sacred Heart is Jesus as the good shepherd. How touching and consoling is the love of the Redeemer’s heart illustrated by a shepherd. He longingly looks for the lost sheep so as to then take it on his shoulders or press it against his heart. In this hospitable way, the divine shepherd also looks to this very day for us sinners, the lost and out-cast. The Lord does not give up on anyone; no one is lost forever in his eyes. His heart looks for us with perseverance! For today, as in those days, he has compassion with the nations’ multitudes who are like sheep without a shepherd.

Because of its beauty, the parable of the Prodigal Son that St. Luke recounts to us is /called “*the gospel within the gospel*”. Nowhere else is the merciful father’s heart revealed like it is here. The father lovingly keeps a lookout for him, rushes to meet the ragged son, embraces and kisses him even before the son can admit to his sins. He is more surprised that the eldest son cannot be pleased with his father’s merciful goodness. Although the older son had always been close to his father, he still did not take after his father. We as Christians should learn, regardless of confession, to be merciful and pleased with our whole heart when someone begins a new life.

When Jesus gathered his apostles in the room for the Last Supper during the week of his Passion, he washed their feet. By this humble service of love, he taught them that their hearts first must become similar to his if they are to serve in the same way. Afterwards, Jesus gave the most precious gift at the solemn celebration of the Paschal meal—the Holy Eucharist, his whole God-man being and nature. Then we see the man of sorrows going out, devastated to the heart and sweating blood, suffering in the Garden of Olives. Never will words be able to describe the spiritual and physical suffering that the Redeemer suffered out of love for us. His pierced, redemptive heart, which gave itself until the last drop, remains open for people of all times.

The piercing of His Heart

Truly this man was the Son of God

Looking into the future, 500 years before Christ, the prophet Zechariah wrote, *"They will look upon him whom they have pierced!"* (Zac 12:10). John, standing next to the Coredeptrix, experienced the fulfillment of these words under the cross, *"When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out"* (Jn 19:33-34). The roman centurion Longinus, who pierced Jesus' Heart, changed at that instance, so to say, into an eyewitness and worshipper of the pierced Lord from the first hour. In front of everyone, also before Jesus' enemies, he convincingly

proclaimed his creed, *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

Especially for our time dominated by science, the precious relic of Christianity the Shroud of Turin speaks to us in a fascinating way about the pierced heart of Jesus. Precise scientific research on Jesus' linen cloth as well as computer analysis and three dimensional computer images made at the NASA Space Center confirm what is written in the Gospel about the suffering and death of Jesus. It is clearly seen on the shroud that a lot of blood and, apart from it, a serous fluid flowed from the gaping wound in the heart.

Who opens the Heart of Mary, finds the Heart of Jesus and only the Heart of Jesus

One may say without exaggeration that Our Lady was not just the first, but also the greatest, worshipper of the Sacred Heart. For this divine and human heart was formed in her womb. Right from the start, there was no one who could feel all the interior movements of her child like she did.

Her Immaculate Heart was full of love for God. As the young saint Gabriele Possenti recognized this, he prayed admiringly, *"I believe, Our Lady, that only you perfectly fulfilled the commandment 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,' so much so that even the blessed seraphs could come down from heaven into your heart to learn how to love God."*

She motherly embraces mankind with the same love! This unity of two hearts reached its climax on Calvary, since both hearts were pierced there. Had Simeon not already prophesized in the temple to the young mother, *"a sword will pierce your soul too"* (Lk 2:35). Our Lady once explained so beautifully this unity between the Coredeptrix and the Redeemer to St. Bridget from Sweden, *"Adam and Eve sold the world for an apple. My son and I bought the world with one heart."* Therefore there was one single heart, just one love for the common goal, the redemption of humanity and creation!

He rested on Jesus' Heart

This privilege of resting on the chest of the Lord at the Last Supper was given to the young apostle John. He was the one who characterized himself five times in his Gospel as *"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* (Jn 21:20). From the cross, Jesus entrusted to him what

was dearest, his mother. The *"Apostle of the Sacred Heart"*, as described by some theologians of the middle age, understood that, in the end, only love matters. And so as an old man he gently urged in his letters, *"Little children, love one another!"*

"Put your hand in my side!"

After what happened on Good Friday, the Apostles' faith in Jesus' mission collapsed. Likewise, the faith in their vocation was dead; all that remained for the eleven was their sincere love for Jesus. By coming in the evening on Easter Sunday, the risen Lord took all doubt away from their souls. *"We have seen the Lord,"* (Jn 20:25a) they told Thomas, full of joy. Yet he, not having grasped this Easter joy, made a defiant condition for believing, *"Unless I see*

the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (25b). Just one week later the risen Lord granted this incredible demand, *"Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe"* (27). Because of this, Thomas became in the true sense of the word an *"Apostle of the Sacred Heart"*. Moved, he confessed, *"My Lord and my God!"* (28).

The Princes of the Apostles – Peter and Paul

Peter, an Apostle of the Sacred Heart? Yes, different than Thomas, different than John but not less! Of all people, did not Simon Peter's heart have to become more and more a second heart of Jesus so that he could live his vocation as *"Christ on earth"*? With a lot of patience and psychological sensitivity, the Lord used very concrete situations to introduce *"his Simon"* with a firm hand to his divine way of loving. Peter saw through all the circumstances that Jesus had to save him, and he was conscious of how badly he needed a change of heart. Such insights are part of worshipping the Sacred Heart of Jesus! The risen Lord gave the chance to this big-hearted man, who could love so eagerly and spontaneously, to make up for everything. He could tell his Lord and master three times that he loves him. When Peter stood up after his fall, Jesus' love intensified even more and he entrusted the whole flock to

him, *"Feed my lambs, feed my sheep"* (Jn 21:15-16).

After Jesus, we know Paul better than anyone else in the New Testament. Although the Apostle of the Nations, in all probability, did not meet the Lord in person, there is no other Apostle who penetrated the Heart of Jesus so deeply. No other responded so much to his love. After Damascus, Paul did not want to know anything other than the community that was with him. The Apostle of the Pagans shied away from no work, effort, suffering nor danger for his beloved Lord. We can simply open the letters of St. Paul to see how much the Sacred Heart of Jesus loves us. Although we seldom read about *"the heart of the Lord,"* there is a lot about *"Christ's love"*. The nations' Apostle was the nicest living example of this love. Therefore St. John Chrysostom, one of the best experts of Paul's letters, said, *"Paul's heart is Christ's heart!"*

Veneration of the Sacred Heart in the time of the Fathers

*I*n the whole first millennium, the saints and the great ones of the Church did not yet speak about the “Sacred Heart”, but rather about the “wound in his side”. Let us take a look at just two wellknown western Church Fathers, St. Ambrose (339-397) and his spiritual son St. Augustine (354-430). St. Ambrose was chosen to be the Bishop of Milan when he was 35 years old. Being a tireless shepherd and a famous preacher, he always found a way to speak about his favorite subject, “the opened side of the Lord as the origin of the Church”. He wrote, “As Eve was formed from the side of the sleeping Adam, so is the Church born from the pierced heart of Christ who died on the cross.” Illustratively and in simple words, he explained something very beautiful to the believers, “Water flowed from the rock for the nation of Israel; blood flowed from Christ’s side for you. The water quenched their thirst for a short time,

your thirst is quenched forever by the blood.” St. Augustine, called “the genius of the heart”, is not vainly depicted in artwork with a burning heart in his hand. Did he not passionately seek the love that he just could not find in his youth? As a young rhetoric professor, he was downright plagued with pursuing a career and his passions. However, nothing managed to fulfill his interior emptiness. St. Augustine admitted, looking back in his “Confessions”, “I loved you late... I was outside and looked for you there... with a loud cry you called me and broke my deafness.” What an inner redemption must the newly converted Augustine have had to eventually be able to say, “Lord, you have created us for you. Restless is my heart until it rests in you.” He who went into the history of the Church as a genius theologian prayed very simply, “Let us learn from you Christ, because you are meek and humble of heart!”

Veneration of the Sacred Heart in the Middle Ages

*W*ell known as a great Marian devotee, St. Bernard (1091-1153) was at the same time filled with such love for Christ that he brought 30 other outstanding young people of noble background along with him when he entered the monastery as a 21-year-old. Already admired as a saint in all of Europe in his time, he best liked to immerse himself in the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ.

Therefore, artists like to portray the suffering mystic in glorious paintings where he is embraced by the crucified Lord and drawn to his heart. St. Bernard was one of the first to speak, in his wonderful language, directly about “the Sacred Heart”. “The mystery of the Sacred Heart remains open through the wounds in his body... The great mystery of goodness remains open, the depths of mercy remains open.”

Sacred Heart mystics at the Helfta convent

*T*he spiritual wealth of the three great German Sacred Heart mystics St. Mechthild from Magdeburg, Bl. Mechthild from Hackeborn and St. Gertrud from Helfta naturally cannot be grasped in a few lines. Their illustrious, tender dialogue with Jesus certainly sounds somewhat strange today. Yet once you get used to it, the writings of these three Benedictines are an inexhaustible treasure. The nicest testimony, however, given by these remarkable women is their deep friendship with one another. They spent many years together in the same convent. St. Mechthild from Magdeburg (1208-1282), the eldest of them, lived for 30 years as a consecrated lay person. In the last years of her life, she entered the flourishing convent Helfta in Thuringia, where she was warmly received. She is the one to whom Jesus explained, in such wonderful words, his interior life, which she then preserved in her writings. Bl. Mechthild from Hackeborn (1241-1299) came to Helfta already as a child. Talented as an artist and musician, she received a thorough education and became later on a teacher and a close adviser for St. Gertrud (1256-1302).

Let us meditate on just one of the many visions that St. Mechthild had. Once the Lord appeared to her with a dry wooden ring to which he had tied the nicest roses. He said, *“Look, by tying fresh roses onto this dead wood, understand that... no sin is so great that I do not immediately, in my divine mercy, forgive the faults of the contrite sinner nor incline my heart toward him with so much benevolence and gentleness as though he had never done anything wrong.”* “How come, dearest God, that the poor man hardly feels your goodness?” she asks. *“The reason is that he has not completely lost the inner taste of sin nor the desire for it. Otherwise he would undoubtedly feel my forgiveness through and through.”* St. Gertrud the Great, known as the *“Herald of the Sacred Heart”*, outshined all her sisters in intelligence but also in ambition until she converted at age 26. *“Finally convert back to me!”*, the Lord urged her. She obeyed and became a great messenger of Middle Age devotion to the Sacred Heart. In a vision, St. John explained to her, *“The revelation of this heart’s love has been reserved for your time so that through this message the already aged world, which has grown cold in its love to God, will become warm again.”*

“Doctor seraphicus – Doctor of seraphic love”

*S*t. Bonaventure (1221- 1274), another doctor of the church, is an especially nice figure among the saints of the Franciscan mendicant order. He was appointed Superior General when he was 36 years old. The father of his order, *“Poverello—the poor one”* from Assisi, received the grace of bearing the stigmata of the Lord on his own body. It is said that Francis cried so much when meditating, especially on the crucified Lord’s wounded heart, that he almost lost his sight.

Bonaventure went a step further in his veneration of the Sacred Heart. He invites us to, *“go up to the wounded Jesus with all the fervor of your love and self-offering ...and put not only your finger in the nail wounds... but rather enter completely through the gate of the wound in his side to the very heart of Jesus.”* Another saint of the Franciscans, Padre Pio, understood this so well too. He made a habit of *“going to sleep in the evening in the wound of Jesus’ side”*.

A Permanent Exchange of Heart

*S*t. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) came from a large, poor dyer family. She was illiterate, doctor of the Church, peacemaker, support for the clergy and not least, the one who led the Pope back home from his exile in Avignon—and all in just 33 years! No less rich was the interior life of this saint. She once prayed that her stubborn manner be transformed, “*God, create in me a clean heart, renew within me a resolute spirit!*” (Ps 51, 10). She told her spiritual director what happened next, “The

Lord appeared to me, opened my left breast, took out my heart and went away with it.” In the following days she repeated, “*I do not have a heart anymore.*” Jesus appeared to her again; his hands were enclosed around a crimson human heart. He opened her left side once again and gently laid the radiant heart inside. “*Look my dear, precious daughter. I have taken your heart so as to give you my heart in return. It will beat for a life long.*” A scar reminded her of this exchange of heart for her whole life.

St. Francis of Sales (1567-1622)

*I*n the history of saints, Francis of Sales is considered a unique portrayal of the meek, gentle heart of Jesus. Yet he was anything but that by nature! Concerning his violent temper and his explosive nature, he admitted, “*I have to be very careful that I do not sacrifice in one moment, the little gentleness that I have laboriously acquired over 20 years.*” Everyone wanted to be close to him and they all had access to him. He reacted with tranquility to the objections of his confidants, “*What do you expect? These little people to whom you attribute so little importance... come looking for consolation. Should I dismiss them? Where is the love*

in that? I want to love everyone and therefore I am good to them. God has made my heart like this now. I gave it to him so that he can dispose of it completely.” This master of spiritual guidance was convinced, “*In the spiritual life, one has to treat the soul like Jesus himself would.*” “*Be meek, as meek as you possibly can. You can catch more flies with a drop of honey than with a barrel of vinegar. Therefore it is better to be meek than to be too strict.*” That is why St. Vincent de Paul rightly said, “*God, how good you must be when you have already made the Bishop of Genf so kind.*”

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690)

*O*ne of the high points of God’s revelations about his infinite love took place a good 300 years ago in France. The blessed veneration of the Sacred Heart actually has these very appealing, heart to heart, private revela-

tions to thank. Jesus led St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (see Triumph of the Heart #16) to the depths of her being in order to reveal himself to her. He showed her his heart on fire, and this was the image that he wanted everyone to ven-

erate. The Lord asked her to expiate the ingratitude of so many, and in the last, the most important, vision he wished for the introduction of the Feast of the Sacred Heart. *“Jesus showed me his divine heart on a fiery throne, more radiant than the sun and translucent as crystal. His venerable wound was very clearly recognizable. A crown of thorns, symbolizing the wounds that our sins inflict upon him, was wound around his heart. Over it was a cross, a sign that was erected in his heart since the first moment of his incarnation. ... This image should be displayed, but also carried in our heart so that our human heart may be imprinted by divine love, filled with all graces, and all our disordered inclinations may be eliminated. Everywhere where this holy image is put up for veneration, the Lord will pour out his graces and his blessings.”*

This type of Sacred Heart veneration is, of course, not just devotion but rather an entire plan for life, a lifestyle. It is about imitat-

ing the Sacred Heart interiorly, in its humility, goodness, compassion, its kindness and tenderness, its consideration and, above all, in its forgiveness! True love lives from forgiveness. Jesus gave Margaret Mary Alacoque twelve wonderful promises for those who venerate his heart. Let us consider a few of these powerful promises: *“I will grant peace to families.” “I will comfort them in all their afflictions.” “I will be a secure place of refuge for them in life and especially at the hour of their death.”* Among the twelve promises Jesus also made the great pledge, *“I promise you in the excessive mercy of My Heart that my all-powerful love will grant everyone who receives Holy Communion on the First Friday of nine consecutive months to be in my grace at the moment of death and they shall not die without receiving the Sacraments.”*

What a promise, when you consider that the majority of people die without the assistance of a priest!

“I will give the priests the gift of converting even the most hardened sinners.”

St. Veronica Giuliani
(1660-1727)

*T*his Italian mystic shows us a very different aspect of love to the Sacred Heart. The Lord visibly imprinted the instruments used in his passion on the heart of this Capuchin abbess. St. Veronica was supposed to sketch this heart out of obedience. But since she could not draw, she asked Sr. Florida Cevoli, a holy, similarly gifted sister, to help. She cut out a heart

from red paper, arranged the signs for the passion on white paper according to the exact length and order and wrote down symbolic letters with a feather. After St. Veronica's death, the bishop ordered her heart to be opened. In the right ventricle, the symbols of suffering were found exactly the way the saint had described them.

St. Teresa Margaret Redi (1747-1770)

Even in her school days, the life of this pretty Florentine noble was filled with a deep love for the Sacred Heart which her father, Ignazio Redi, aroused in her. *“Jesus knows very well that since my early childhood, I wanted nothing other than to please him.”* She entered the Carmel in Florence when she was 17 and died only five years later. Her life in the convent consisted, above all, of hidden service. All the saint’s deeds were done with such a unification with God, that once, after her service at an ill person’s bedside, she went to Holy Communion without a moment of recollection convinced that, *“such an activity was also a good preparation for this divine sacrament.”* Although well-balanced and friendly exteriorly, sometimes the state of her soul was completely different, *“Such an aversion to the slightest act of virtue often seized me so that I had to ... force myself to do it.”* *“That’s why I would like to enclose myself in your loveable heart as in a wound, so as to lead the hidden life of love and sacrifice in you and with you.”* She introduced the Feast of the Sacred Heart into the Carmel in a very original way. On the feast, she erected

and solemnly decorated an image of the Sacred Heart before prayer in the choir

The sisters had hardly recovered from their astonishment when the lively Teresa Margaret began singing a song to the Sacred Heart with musical accompaniment. From then on, the Carmelites celebrated the feast once a year and Teresa Margaret’s love for the Sacred Heart spread through the entire convent. One day, an exhilarating realization that *“God is love”* was placed in her heart. She was able to savor this love from God for several days. Returning to the daily routine of faith, St. Teresa Margaret suffered even more from a feeling of incapacity to return this love of God and of being cold. That is why she received the nickname, *“glowing snow”*. She wanted to give her life that devotion to the Sacred Heart could be spread. She died unexpectedly and quickly from a serious illness with a picture of the Sacred Heart in her hand. Her confessor, however, was convinced, *“If this illness had not caused her death, her soul would have detached itself from her body by its consuming love for God.”*

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779-1865)

From early childhood on, Sophie Barat was prepared for her vocation as a charismatic teacher. During the French Revolution, she taught her older brother Louis, and the whole family knelt down in front of a Sacred Heart image in times of danger. God showed this girl through a priest her future path: to spread the veneration of the Sacred Heart through the

upbringing of children and youth. This fit very well to Sophie. At the age of 21, she prayed the consecration to the Sacred Heart with three other girls and this was, so to speak, the beginning of the *“Sisters of the Sacred Heart”*, of which she was to become the mother superior. Mother Sophie energetically directed her community for 60 years, and she was consumed

by her apostolate with children and the youth. That was her mission! *"I only have two passions: the Sacred Heart and children."* She never looked at numbers. *"I would have also founded the community for just one soul!"* Always active, Mother Sophie nevertheless interrupted her work and paid a short visit to Jesus in the chapel because she was convinced, *"the supernatural life has to be the pulse in a sister of the Sacred Heart. Only in this way can she ignite the supernatural life in the children."* She and her spiritual daughters were led by another valuable principle, *"Let the children form a habit of making small sacrifices so that they will be able to make greater sacrifices later on in the world."*

With her gaze on the kind heart of the Lord, this experienced educator lived and learned, *"the longer I live, the more convinced I am that consistent mildness and firm direction are the best for the children."* *"The purpose of my life was to lead the abandoned and alienated youth of the Revolution back to the Church. And now in my old age, I still have the desire to be surrounded by the youth, to see the children and to hear them."* As with every good educator, the saint also learned a lot from these little ones, *"The wound of the divine heart is wide. There is room for everyone in there. However, to penetrate deeply into the innermost part, one has to be very small."*

Mother Francesca Xavier Cabrini (1850 - 1917)

The cornerstone of St. Francesca's love for the missions and above all for the Sacred Heart was laid already in her youth. When she said, *"To be a missionary means to be completely offered up for the Heart of Jesus,"* she summarized the most beautiful of her interior dispositions. After her training to be a teacher, this Italian founder of the *"Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus"*, though only 30 years old, was sent by Pope Leo XIII to America at the turn of the century. This great missionary, despite her weak health and the great strain, crossed the ocean 30 times. Her heart, glowing with love, drove her, with her spiritual daughters in America, to care for the immigrants who, as sacrifices of industrialization, lived in great poverty and misery. She opened 67 houses, orphanages, schools and hospitals there with her missionary sisters. Mother Cabrini's 37 years of intense apostolate were accompanied by many miracles with which God rewarded her for her faith. For example, she declared at the beginning of September 1912 to her daughters working in the Rocky Mountains near Denver, where they had obtained an inexpensive piece

of land for their children's home but which had no water, *"I tell you, there is most certainly a well here."* Five minutes later, she went over to a big red rock and knocked on it with her cane. *"Dig, because under this rock there is fresh, clear water for everyone to drink; pure, clean water to keep the children clean, a wonderful mineral water."* The well to this day has never dried up and has never frozen. Francesca's efforts for the Italian immigrants were invaluable. Poor, unable to speak the language, taken advantage of and despised, they complained to her, *"We live like animals here. We live and die without priests, without teachers, without doctors."* Mother Cabrini did everything she could to mitigate their misery. She even went down into the mines to tell the Italian miners that God never forgets them. A large, nice statue of the Sacred Heart had a place of honor in the chapel of each one of her mission stations. This was very important to her. As the movements along the front from World War I were read to her on the morning of the day she died, she trustfully said, *"Whatever happens, I will close my eyes and I won't lift my head from the heart of Jesus."*

Blessed Mary of Jesus Deluil Martiny (1841-1884)

Born in the “City of the Sacred Heart”, Marseille, this strong-willed girl was sure of only one thing, “*My life belongs totally to Jesus.*” She solemnly consecrated herself to the Sacred Heart when she was 26. As a result, the Lord gave her in prayer a deep desire for reparation and expiation after he revealed himself to her the first time. “*People do not know me, I am not loved... I am a treasure that people do not appreciate... I will inspire souls who will understand me.*”

Little by little, Mary received clarity about founding a work for the sanctification of priests.

The result was the congregation “*Daughters of the Sacred Heart*”. Mother Mary of Jesus, as she was called, wrote once to one of her sisters, “*To offer yourself for souls is beautiful and grand! But to offer yourself for... priests’ souls is so beautiful, so grand that you must have a thousand souls, a thousand hearts!*” Mother Mary died, in fact, as a martyr at age 43. An incited helper in the convent garden fired two shots at her head. “*I forgive him! It is for the work, the priest work!*” were her last words after receiving last rites and before she bled to death helplessly.

Mother Louise Margaret Claret de la Touche (1868-1915)

“I am loved by God! He has given me so much grace, not because I am especially good or virtuous. On the contrary, I make many mistakes, but I have believed in His love!”

Louise Margaret Claret de la Touche was also prepared years for her great task in the renewal of the priesthood. “*I will give you the souls of men. They will be priests’ souls. And as I renewed the world 1,900 years ago with 12 men—they were priests—I could renew the world today with 12 priests. But they must be holy priests.*” That such priests may be formed, “*God will found a work. A work, which above all else, will serve the priests,*” Louise Margaret writes. “*If I could only show the priests his heart as I see it, so unspeakably full of goodness and love!*” “*Priests have to go to the Heart of Jesus!*” Jesus promised, “*I will make those who come to my heart pure and strong...*

I will give them new power over souls.” Louise Margaret recognized that “*Jesus’ heart and that of the priest should be one heart—the same virtues... the same loving beat for God, for Mary, the Church and souls.*” “*That a priest’s heart may be transformed, he must, ... penetrating through loving meditation, ... attempt to think like his divine master, to love like him, to live like him. He will be a priest with Christ, a heart with Christ’s heart.*” Then, when he “*has a wide, tender, glowing... heart to love with,*” the people will experience God’s love for them through the priests and will, in turn, also want to love God. That is the goal, and Louise Margaret offered her life for it.

Conchita of Mexico - Maria Conception
Cabrera de Armida
(1862 - 1937)

“Make a sacrifice of yourself for the priests.”

*I*n her 75 years, Conchita knew all the walks of life for a woman (see Triumph of the Heart #13). She was a girl, engaged, married, mother, widow, and grandmother. On top of that, she founded a religious order and, with the permission of the Pope, entered that order as a nun without having to leave her family. Women of any status should feel spoken to, therefore, by the life of Conchita who, always more detached from everything else, became a total mother for priests.

At age 13, this spirited girl was engaged and she married 9 years later. *“For me, there was no other way to God. Yet the love for my husband, which was full of tenderness, never hindered me from loving God. I loved my husband with great simplicity. My love for him was completely enveloped in my love for Jesus.”* Nine children came forth from this happy marriage, and yet young Conchita wrote in her diary, *“In spite of the great goodness of my husband, my soul did not find the fulfillment I expected, and so I brought my heart always closer to God, to find in*

him everything I was missing. My interior emptiness grew, despite my happy marriage, despite all worldly joys.”

At 27, the young mother participated in a retreat where she heard the voice of the Lord for the first time, *“Your mission will be to save souls, especially the souls of priests.” “I experienced a fire burning in me, and it was my sole desire to enflame others with it.”*

The Lord led Conchita to an always-greater interior life; he led her to prayer. She had to be able to receive visions about the renewal of the church. It was her task to remind the world that salvation comes through the cross alone. *“Up to this day, I have made known to the world the love of my heart as I showed it to Margareta Maria. It has been reserved for you in this time, however, to make known the inner suffering of my heart.”* To this end, she founded 5 different communities, always with the sign of the Redeemer’s Cross and a pierced heart, as she often saw in visions.

Countess Maria Droste
(1863-1899)

*O*n the Feast of the Presentation of Mary, November 21, 1878, 15-year-old German countess Maria Droste of Vischering had a decisive experience during Holy Mass. She spoke about it often, *“The homily was about the*

phrase, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.’ The priest explained, in a very simple way, our obligation to give our hearts totally to God because he is not satisfied with a mere part. He wants everything or nothing at all.

At that point I thought, then you have to become a nun! ...I would have loved to plug the ears of my soul by saying that this homily is not for me; the others hear it too and they aren't going to the convent. It was not possible for me, however, to resist the voice of God." This young lady, actually, remained faithful to God's call and at the age of 25, struggles not withstanding, she joined the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Munster. First assigned to educate children and young people, she, just 30 years old, was then surprisingly nominated the superior of the decrepit convent in Porto, Portugal.

In the 5 years that Sr. Maria of the Divine Heart, the name she took as a sister, was in Portugal, she became a pious spiritual mother and had such a magnetism that everyone called her the "Santinha alema", "the beloved saint from Germany". Maria's confessor for the important last 3 years of her life, Don Theotonio, future Archbishop and Patriarch of Goa, wrote, "She possessed a noble, great heart which was open for all suffering inside and outside the convent; like no one else, she possessed the gift to share the balsam of peace and consolation, to pour out hope and surrender."

Consecration of the World

Maria wrote in her autobiography with uncommon openness about the mission which God revealed for her. "I never heard anything with my bodily ears; everything was interior, like when a voice speaks that you hear in your heart and at the same time in your understanding." She entrusted to her surprised confessor on June 4, 1897, "Our Savior gave me instructions to write the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII, asking him to consecrate the whole human race to the Sacred Heart... so that bishops and priests become zealous, sinners convert, heretics and schismatics come back to the Church and also the pagans quickly obtain this grace."

No response came from the Vatican. So Maria, with a painful spinal cord infection and paralysis, wrote Pope Leo XIII again in December with trembling hands asking, "still to offer the Savior his desired consolation and to give veneration to his Sacred Heart a new boost."

A few months later, for Easter 1899, the Pope announced the consecration of the world and told Maria's parents in a private audience, "Tell you daughter that I made this decision based on what she shared with me, and I hope for the greatest graces from this consecration of the world." By this time, the superior in Porto was completely paralyzed and she offered all her pain for this consecration. One of her sisters testified, "On the eve of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, our mother was so weak around 4:00 a.m., that I rushed to have her confessor and her doctor come. She said to me in a very stirring way, 'I must prepare myself well for the Feast of the Sacred Heart... I always prayed that I may die on a Sacred Heart Friday or on the Feast of the Sacred Heart.'" Her prayers were heard. In the afternoon around 3:00, on June 8, 1899, she died. Maria was only 36. In the chapel, they had just begun to pray the vespers for the consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart.

Fr. John Baptist Reus

(1868-1947)

Pope Leo XIII called the June 11, 1899 consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart, “*the greatest act of my pontificate.*” On this day, 32-year-old Jesuit Fr. John Reus wrote in his diary, “*I believe that today is the utmost triumph... that your heart has received from your creatures.... How happy we are that you have chosen us to give you this joy!*” A few months later Fr. Reus left for Brazil where he worked as a missionary until his death 47 years later. He believed his most important mission was to convey that which had totally taken him. “*This precious Sacred Heart loves me without measure, and as much as I am capable, I will love it without measure.*” Fr. John Fr. Reus after his ordination, 1893 Baptist Reus (1868-1947)

At the seminary in Bamberg, Germany, there was always a picture of the Sacred Heart on his desk; and he prayed a hand-written consecration to the Sacred Heart every day, his whole life long. As a young priest already he desired holiness, “*not, however, an illustrious one, but one despised by people.*” His wish was heard completely! Even though Fr. Reus worked for the care of souls interiorly and exteriorly nearly to the point of exhaustion, he had little success in his missionary activity. Perhaps it could be that he was lacking winning social skills and attractive friendliness. He had to fight hard against over-sensitivity, strictness and impatience. This should also be consoling for us to know. Through different circumstances, all his

priestly tasks and responsibilities were eventually taken away.

In spite of his human limits, his students felt the inner unity that their teacher lived with the Lord. Some of his students said later, “*How often I went in the chapel after school to give thanks for the grace to be the student of a saint.*” In his sober manner, Fr. Reus never sought an extraordinary charism. It was quite the opposite, “*everything mystical I avoid like the plague.*” God, however, still made from this modest priest a great mystic of the Sacred Heart. His visions during the Holy Mass, his constant conversation with the Lord, his experience of being locked up in the Heart of Jesus, an exchange of hearts with Jesus and many other special graces which he received remained nearly completely hidden until his death. Fr. Reus’ spiritual director made him write down his experiences and extraordinary graces, something to which he could not fight back. “*Resistance is impossible.*” “*It seems to me... that the purpose of my life is to show that the divine priest loves, and closes in his loving heart, his priests, and that he awaits a glowing response from them above all.*” His superior testified about him before his death, “*With the advance of his illness... he was no longer the strict Fr. Reus from earlier. Now he shone toward everyone with goodness, friendliness... everybody felt the radiance of a deep, inner joy.*”

St. Faustina Kowalska

(1905-1938)

*“My mercy is greater than your sins
and those of the entire world.”*

Since veneration of the Sacred Heart is something foreign to the majority of believers today, God had to find a new way for us. To reach this end, God made use of St. Faustina Kowalska. He shared with her the message of mercy through which Jesus let us see the very deepest essence of his heart—his mercy. We already published a whole issue of *Triumph of the Heart* about the revelations of Divine Mercy to Polish mystic Faustina (see no. 19). In these indescribably beautiful messages, the Lord no longer speaks in the strictness of the Old Testament, but in the language of the merciful Redeemer, so directly and deeply, as if he would speak personally to you. “Come and confide in your God, who is love and mercy” (1486), Jesus asks. “Tell me all, My child, hide nothing from Me, because My loving Heart, the Heart of your Best Friend, is listening to you.... Do not be absorbed in your misery... gaze on My Heart filled with goodness, and be imbued with

My sentiments. Strive for meekness and humility” (1486). Jesus explains to us through St. Faustina how we can imitate his virtues. “Strive to make your heart like unto My humble and gentle Heart. Never claim your rights. Bear with great calm and patience everything that befalls you. Do not defend yourself when you are put to shame, though innocent. Let others triumph. Do not stop being good when you notice that your goodness is being abused. I Myself will speak up for you when it is necessary” (1701). St. Faustina gives us advice about this from her own experience. “When I see that the burden is beyond my strength, I do not consider or analyze it or probe into it, but I run like a child to the Heart of Jesus and say only one word to Him: ‘You can do all things.’ And then I keep silent, because I know that Jesus Himself will intervene in the matter, and as for me, instead of tormenting myself, I use that time to love Him” (1033).

The numbers in parenthesis are reference numbers to the Diary of St. Faustina

Dear Reader!

With the help of these few examples from the 2000-year history of the Church, you can see how much veneration of the Sacred Heart changed the lives of saints, even lives of whole lands. We should also then be courageous and take refuge in the opened heart of Our Lord, to love and imitate it, now in a time where Mother Teresa said:

“The greatest sickness of the world is not AIDS, but a lack of love.”

A happy hour of death

*A story from the mission
by Sr. Teresa Palminota*

The distances of the villages belonging to our parish in Talmenka, Siberia often prohibit us missionaries from accompanying the faithful in their hour of death. It is amazing the grace and consolation that God can give in these important moments just through listening to the “Chaplet of Divine Mercy” cassette. We saw this when Paul Root died after a long illness on September 11, 2002 at age 62 in the little, unknown village Cheryomushkeno.

*P*aul Root was baptized as a child and raised by his faithful mother. As a young teacher of Mathematics, Physics, German, and Drawing, he tried to transmit not only knowledge to his students but also Christian values. Victor, one of his students and later a close friend and brother-in-law, remembered later on, “*He opened up the meaning of the Bible to me. I also learned from him how I, as a man, should look at my wife—as a gift entrusted to me by God.*” Paul was also an esteemed boss by the 70 employees at his commercial business. He was just and always had a heart for the poor, totally indifferent whether they thanked him or not. During the time of persecution, Paul maintained his faith, and has come now for some years already, together with his wife, to the Sunday Holy Mass at our mission station in Talmenka. It is a quite strenuous drive on 50 miles of bad, unpaved roads. Last year, Paul was diagnosed with cancer. Early one morning, the couple came to us unexpectedly in the church asking to make their confessions and to receive Holy Communion. “*Oh, how much I desired to receive Holy Communion,*” Paul said before he entrusted to us that this day he would have to undergo a very difficult operation at the hospital. Painful months passed.

Paul’s illness exhausted this large, stout, barely 60-year-old man more and more. Ten days before his death, an old Jesuit Fr. Alexej who was substituting for Fr. Thomas, brought Paul the viaticum. I asked our friend, who was now only skin and bones, if he wanted to offer his suffering up to God. He did not understand at first. As I explained to him the value of suffering which we offer up, however, he happily consented. “*Everything passes. Only Our Lord God remains,*” he said suddenly. Three days before his death, we brought him Holy Communion again. We gave him a copy of the cassette “*The Chaplet of Divine Mercy*” during this visit. His wife told us later how much he liked to listen to this cassette and how each time he heard the Russian song “*Sierze Gospoda - Sacred Heart, have mercy on us*” he began to cry. He listened to this cassette also on the day of his death. At the last moment, he played “*Sierze Gospoda*” one more time and died with tears in his eyes. His relatives let the cassette continue playing until the casket was carried out of the house. Before and after the funeral, until the graveyard, the songs and the text of the Merciful Rosary were a consolation for everybody, even those who did not understand the German cassette.

Prison Conversion

“Andre, we have a rendezvous!”

Andre Levet: Excerpts from his speech at the conference
“Apotres pour l’an 2000”, 1988 in Versailles, France

My name is Andre Levet. I was born into an atheist family and I never heard anybody speak about God... I ran away from home when I was 13 years old to Marseille where I slept on the street or in abandoned train cars... It was in this time that I ended up in prison the first time... I was arrested again at 15 for armed robbery... Later on, as the leader of a gang, I specialized in robbery. One day I was in Laval, France to “take care of some business.” As I was walking along, I saw a priest in a black cassock on the other side of the street. I went over to him and since I had never seen a priest dressed as such before, I asked him if he was a man or a woman.

“I am a man of God,” he answered.

“Where is your God? I have never seen him,” I said.

I see that you do not know God,” he responded to me, *“but when you have some time once, come and we can speak together. I live at 12 Solférino Street.”* I never forgot that address. A few months later I was in Laval again on “business”. I came, by chance, to this street and visited the priest. He was at home and said to me, *“I was waiting for you!”*

This priest became my friend. He gave me advice which I never followed and whenever he spoke to me about God I said, *“Leave your God where he is!”*

Some time later a robbery in Rennes went awry. My accomplice was shot and I was locked up. When I broke out, I organized a drug ring in South America. I was imprisoned three times and three times I broke out before I was extradited to France. If you counted all my offenses together, I should have served time for 120 years. In the end, I was sentenced to 15 years in prison. At the high security prison in

Chateau Thierry the warden greeted me with the words, *“Here you will either obey or die.”* I responded by turning over his desk.

I spent long months, long years in this place. There is someone who followed me there, however, my good priest. He had not given up on me. He wrote me a letter once a month; he did not say much about God, only a word or two. *“Andre, God lives!”* I complained about my situation once, *“I go to my cell in my block and I see nothing but my four walls.”* His answer to me was, *“I am sending you a big book. You can read it the whole time you are in prison, but also when you are set free.”*

The book came—four large, bound gospels...

“Aha! The priest was still able to smuggle his God into my cell,” I thought. To please him, I opened it 9 times in 10 years...

One day, I thought again about this book. While I waited in vain for a weapon or a file with which I could break out, there was only one thing remaining for me in this hopeless situation—Jesus. I challenged this Jesus, *“When you really exist, when you can really do everything that is written in this book, then good, come and visit me. I propose a rendezvous; come tonight at 2 a.m., then we will have quiet time to discuss things. And if you are so strong, then I only want one thing from you. Open this cell and I’m outta here.”* This Jesus, whom I wanted to make an accomplice in my escape, answered me, and I fled with him even though I remained within my four walls. This is what happened:

During the night between June 11 and 12, in the year 1960, I fell asleep as usual with the bars of my cell in view. I slept deeply. On this night, somebody woke me from my sleep by shaking me.

I jumped out of bed, ready to beat up the intruder; but there was nobody there. Still, I heard these words deep inside me which reverberated like in a tunnel, *“It is 2 o’clock Andre, we have a rendezvous!”*

I leapt for the iron door of my cell and yelled through the tiny window to the guard, *“Why are you bothering me?”*

He answered, *“What are you all excited about, I didn’t say anything.”*

Then I asked him, *“What time is it?”*

“Two o’clock... on the dot.”

I did not have any time to think about it because the voice came again, even stronger, interiorly, *“I am your God, the God of all people.”*

I clenched my fist and cried, *“But how can you speak in my ear when I don’t see you and don’t meet you? Who are you? Leave me alone, go away, or show yourself!”*

And then I saw—there by the bars which I always imagined blowing up so that I could be free—a glorious light. Words cannot describe it. The ceiling and walls were gone—heaven was in my cell. In the light was a man whom I did not know, whom I had never seen. He showed me his pierced hands, his pierced feet, his opened side.

And I heard words in my cell which passed right through me, *“This is also for you.”*

In this moment, it was as if scales fell from my eyes for the first time. The heavy scales from 27 years of sin were finally removed, and I could see clearly. Quickly I realized that I am a sinner and that he is the savior! For the first time in my life, I bowed my neck and fell on my knees. I cried for the first time in my life; for the first time somebody wanted to love me! From 2 to 7 a.m., when they opened the cell, I went on my knees—for 5 hours—back through all the evil that I had done; and it burst out of me like an over-mature abscess. The guard found me crying on my knees at 7 o’clock and I said to him, *“I will never spit on you again, I won’t hit or steal from anybody, then I would be doing it each time to Jesus.”* The astounded guard thought in the beginning that I was playing a trick, but very quickly he saw that I had changed totally.

After this encounter, I had to serve six more years, a time which God, this divine artist, used to transform me from a stone block of hate and atheism into a small, really unimportant witness of his merciful love.

*“Let the weak, sinful soul have no fear to approach Me,
for even if it had more sins than there are grains of sand in the world,
all would be drowned in the unmeasurable depths of My mercy.”*

Jesus to St. Faustina (Diary 1059)