

Fr. John Hardon cites children’s instinctive attraction to the Sacred Heart

Among the hundreds of pages on Catholic theology and Jesuit spirituality Father John Hardon, S.J. has left us on the internet ([www:\\Hardon archives](http://www.Hardonarchives.com)) is a monograph on teaching the Sacred Heart devotion to children. He says it’s not by chance that young saints like John Berchmans, Dominic Savio, the Little Flower or Maria Goretti reached a heroic stature of sanctity at an early age. In these cases and countless others, the guidance and support of parents or teachers was evidently an important factor in leading them to holiness of life. Fr. Hardon points out how natural it is for young people to be inspired by the Sacred Heart devotion.

He cites a religious brother who was successful in drawing high school boys to devotion to the Sacred Heart by showing them the manly love Christ demonstrated throughout his life, even to his death on Calvary. The Lord’s whole life was rich in the moral strength and self-sacrifice demanded of strong male characters; Christ showed these traits on every page of the gospel. The brother went on to say that he promoted daily mass and communion among his students because he found that students who had the courage to take on this way of life gained the strength to lead manly lives out of love for Christ.

Hardon says the principle is always the same, namely, showing love through sacrifice inspires a loving response in others. The heart is readily understood as a symbol of Christ’s love for us. Christ’s whole life can be viewed as repeated proofs of this courageous love. In the process, Fr. Hardon says, the teacher must clarify the difference between the true love of friendship and mere emotion or sentimental passion.

Experienced teachers have found that love for Christ’s Sacred Heart has an instinctive appeal for children and is a strong incentive for good behavior and great effort of all kinds. Fr. Hardon points out that devotion to the Sacred Heart appeals easily to children, and they are readily attracted to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Many teachers, he says, find that even children in kindergarten respond generously when Christ’s presence in the Eucharist is

explained to them. A teacher told him once, “Among very small children I have, the Sacred Heart in the Blessed Sacrament appeals very strongly. For many of them it is like finding a real Friend.”



Father Hardon says the most comprehensive plan for teaching school children to understand the Mass and the Holy Eucharist and their place in true devotion to the Sacred Heart is in the Eucharistic Crusade (which has evolved since 1962 as the Eucharistic Youth Movement). As the model of the Apostleship of Prayer for children, the EYM is thriving worldwide today in drawing young people to devotion to the Sacred Heart. It enrolls thousands of persons from age five to the mid-twenties in many countries. It is seen as an ideal introduction to a life dedicated to the Sacred Heart as members of the Apostleship of Prayer.

Morning Offering

God our Father, I offer you my entire day --my thoughts, words, prayers, actions, joys and sufferings — in union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as he offers himself in the Eucharist for the salvation of the world.

May the Holy Spirit, who guided Jesus, be my guide and my strength today so that I may witness to your love.

Together with Mary, the mother of Jesus, I pray with all the members of the Apostleship of Prayer for this month's special intentions as proposed by the Holy Father.

Join 40 million others in this worldwide union of persons praying for the intentions of the Pope

Apostleship of Prayer Pope Francis' Intentions for 2016

January

That sincere dialogue among men and women of different faiths may bring peace and justice.
That the Holy Spirit will enable Christians to overcome divisions by dialogue and fraternal charity.

February

That we may take good care of creation—God's free gift—protecting it for future generations.
For increasing chances for dialogue and encounter between Xtianity and the peoples of Asia.

March

That families in need may receive support and that children may grow in healthy and peaceful areas
That Xtians amid discrimination and persecution may be strong and faithful through Church prayer

April

That small farmers may receive a just reward for their precious labor.
That African Xtians may witness to their love and faith in Christ amid political-religious conflicts.

May

That in every country women may be honored and respected and their contribution esteemed.
That families, communities and groups may pray the holy rosary for evangelization and peace

June

That those aged, marginalized, and alone find, even in big cities, chances for encounter and solidarity.
That seminarians and young religious may have mentors who live in gospel joy and will prepare them wisely for their mission.

July

That indigenous peoples, whose identity and very being are threatened, will be shown due respect.
That the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, in her mission to the continent, may announce the Gospel with renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

August

That sports may be a chance for friendly encounters between peoples and may serve for world peace.
That Christians may live the Gospel, giving witness to faith, honesty and love of neighbor.

September

That each person may serve the common good and help build a society that puts the human person at the center.
That, through the sacraments and Scripture, Xtians may become alert to their mission to evangelize.

October

That journalists, carrying out their work, may be led by respect for truth and a strong sense of ethics.
That World Mission Day may renew within all Christian communities the joy of the Gospel and the responsibility to announce it.

November

That the countries taking in many displaced persons and refugees may find support and solidarity.
That parish priests and lay people may collaborate in serving the people without discouragement.

December

That the scandal of child-soldiers may be eliminated all over the world.
That peoples of Europe may rediscover the beauty, good and truth of the Gospel, with joy and hope.

Fr. Hardon’s ideas for making the Sacred Heart devotion real for young people

Father Hardon’s ideas for stimulating devotion to the Sacred Heart among students are very practical. He offers **a set of questions for every month**, which were originally drawn up by high school sodalists.

A. For example, in September, under “Spiritual exercises,” students are asked to reflect on questions like:

1. *Mass?* The Catholic ideal calls for daily Mass, if possible. This “if possible” does not mean “if I find it easy to do so.” No one finds it easy. Is it possible for me to go to Mass daily? What sacrifices do I make to do things I naturally like to do---games, trips, and parties. Yet, will I arrange my daily schedule so that I am able to attend Mass in the morning?
2. *Communion?* At every Mass I attend? Am I anxious to get close to Christ, my Friend? Do I ever try to practice mental prayer? On Christ in the Gospels? According to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius? On some mysteries of the rosary? Using some spiritual book or pamphlet?
3. Do I realize that prayer consists chiefly not in having good thoughts, but in “talking things over with Christ” ---acts of faith, hope, love, contrition, adoration, thanksgiving, and petition.
4. Do I ask my heavenly Mother to help me pray well?
5. *Examination of Conscience?* Do I make it before retiring? On my knees? Do I ask myself the very important question, “How have I served Christ our Lord today?” In what have I failed? Do I make an act of perfect contrition?

B. Another technique suggested by Fr. Hardon is using Sacred Heart promoters in each class.

My greatest success, he wrote, in spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Apostleship of Prayer has been through the promoters’ group. In the beginning, the group must be hand-picked. I chose good promoters by having a teacher screen each of the upper three years and give me names of boys they thought would be likely candidates for the group. Some were eliminated in the course of talks with the teachers, and we finally got the list down to two or three boys in each class. (Note: Father Hardon taught in an all-boys school.)

Then I extended a personal invitation to each one to come to an organizational meeting. At this meeting I explained the purpose of the group--to make the Sacred Heart devotion a way of life for themselves and to help spread it to others. Out of an original forty-four or so, thirty persevered. Others have also have since asked to join, and of course I have accepted them, since I had intended to make the group “open” after the original hand-picking.

We call ourselves “The Men of the Sacred Heart.” The boys like this name better than “Promoters of the Apostleship of Prayer.” We have weekly meetings, and attendance has been very good. If the boys fail to attend without giving me a good reason, it is held against them and they are dropped after excessive absences.

The weekly meeting usually consists of four phases, with variations:

- An instruction by the director on some phase of the devotion and the Apostleship of Prayer.
- An instruction on one or more of the rules of the promoters which provide for their spiritual formation.
- Discussion of apostolic activities.
- Discussion of the Sacred Heart as He appears in one of the gospel scenes.

To help the boys with their personal development, I have conferences with them individually. I try to see them once a month if possible. These conferences are necessary if they are to carry out their spiritual duties, for they need personal encouragement and instruction in this regard.

Most of the apostolic activities related to the devotion are carried out through this group. Some of the things we have done this year: We have sold a good but reasonably priced plastic-framed picture of the Sacred Heart. The promoters took the orders in their classrooms. When they delivered the pictures, they distributed also a simple booklet explaining how to practice the Sacred Heart devotion through the Apostleship of Prayer.

The promoters also have pushed visits to the Sacred Heart present in the Blessed Sacrament. They got their classmates to sign up to promise to make a few minutes’ visit on one or more school days.

The Holy Spirit breathes life and hope into a sad and troubled world

As the Holy Spirit breathed into the soul of the Virgin, he inspired a new life filled with an abundance of human love, which mirrored the divine love that the Spirit carries in the Trinity. The love alive in the heart of this child—a heart that would develop within about a dozen weeks—would be the incomparable example and prototype of all human love. As Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God (Col 1:15), the love that would grow in his heart would be the supreme reflection of the divine love of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father. This was the very love of the Spirit himself. And, as Christ was both God and man, it was joined to the divine love of the second person of the Trinity.

Christ was to be the first-born Son, superior to all other created things and the perfect expression of God's love for mankind. Through him God created all things (Col 1:16). Thus everything would bear the imprint of his love—everything in heaven and on earth, both the seen and the unseen. . . . And it was a productive love. Through the Son, God would bring the whole universe back to himself (Col 1: 20).

The love that burned in the Heart of Christ was to be the divine force that would draw the world back to God. And the love that he inspired in the hearts of countless followers would be an important part of the means he would use in achieving this great design. Thus, the love that flowed from the Spirit into the Heart of Christ would draw many other hearts and be the means of winning the world back to God.

The love of the Heart of Christ—a love that burned so bright and went so far as to lead him to sacrifice his life for mankind—should have been enough to inspire countless men and women of every time and place to mirror that love and dynamic sacrifice in their own lives. But the response to that love grew cold over the centuries, and people needed to be told again of its power and support.

So it was in the 17th century that the Holy Spirit would remind the world of Christ's intense love

for mankind through devotion to his Sacred Heart. The brilliance and power of that love was recognized by chosen souls during a period when large numbers of people had closed their hearts to God's love and lived in mortal fear of his harsh demands and the narrow way of salvation.

Amid the reluctance of people today to believe in God's loving kindness, we may be confident that Christ urges mankind to admit once again the reality of God's love for the world. It is time to let the kindness of God our Father shine forth in our hearts and accept the truth of his loving concern.

What we seek today is a renewed outpouring of the Spirit in the souls of people, so they can know the strength of God's love and the power of his desire to draw people to his embrace. This will not be easy because faith has grown so faint and evil is so rampant. And yet the power of the Holy Spirit is the most dynamic force in the world, and God's love for the world he created has certainly not diminished. This is the same love that the Spirit breathed into the Heart of Jesus Christ, and the love that he has inspired in our hearts as well.

Thus, we come to the core of our faith, namely, that Christ's love for the world he redeemed has not diminished and that he remains eager to have the Spirit instill that love in people everywhere, even in those who do not know the Spirit and such as burn with hatred for their fellow man. The power of Christ's love will not be diminished by our limited vision, the narrowness of our own hearts or the rejection of his approach.

[This is the 4th in a series of articles on the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Sacred Heart devotion.]

Our best wishes and prayers for a joyous and blessed Christmas, as we pray for peace throughout the world in the New Year.

This newsletter is produced at Loyola High School, P.O. Box 1140, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania by Fr. Ted Walters, S.J. It is intended to remind us of the treasure Christ has committed to us in devotion to the Sacred Heart. Editorial contributions to this newsletter are warmly welcomed. Please send us the names and email addresses of additional persons who would like to receive issues of the newsletter. (To send such names or for items to contribute, you may email: <twalters2002@yahoo.co.uk>) Thank you.